

ART. IV.—LESSING.

Lessing : His Life and Writings. By JAMES SIME, M.A.

Two volumes, 8vo. London : Trübner & Co.

“THE history of literature is the great *Morgue*, where each one seeks out his dead, those whom he loves or is related to. When I see there, among so many insignificant bodies, Lessing and Herder, it sets my heart a-beating. How could I proceed without gently kissing your pale lips as I passed !” So wrote Heine in his “New History of German Literature ;” and the Past all too fully justified the passionate regret implied in his pathetic yet half-scornful mention of Lessing among the “insignificant bodies” waiting to be claimed by friendly hands. The image is as striking as it is faithful. Lessing’s life was an unceasing struggle, unbrightened by any of the rewards that fall so thickly on remarkable merit in our day, and it was long before his posthumous fame was fulfilled. But he, too, was a “brave soldier in the war of liberation,” and his emblem, like Heine’s, might be a sword. He bore with him in his heart the wounds he had received in his conflicts ; but he never shrunk in face of danger, and was never known weakly to raise complaint. Amid uncongenial labour for daily bread, he never forgot the high ideal he cherished of a great German literature ; and though tried by poverty and neglected, he was always generous. He was most modest in his personal wants : what to another would have been deprivation, to him was comfort ; but he was liberal in giving even where there was no claim upon him ; and he was often in great straits, his mind tormented by trivial distresses that might easily have been spared him. His great and only fear was that his work might bear the marks of it. He said of himself, with a pathetic flicker of gentle humour that reminds us of one of Burns’s latest utterances, “*I have had no luck !*” He was persecuted and proscribed—treated by those in power as one suspect—at whose hands good order might suffer. Orthodoxy, in those days strong, was up in arms against him, though he was as ready to protect what was of real worth in it against a rabid and destructive Rationalism as to disclose its weakness and dogmatic pretension ; appealing from the worship of the dead letter to the spirit of Christianity, and arguing that the Truth which it inspired was more valuable than the truths which it taught. Though he lived a busy and productive life, inspired by the highest and most patriotic aims, he died so poor that the

Duke of Brunswick had to bury him out of the public purse. "The Germans," said Goethe, "need time to be thankful."

The very width of Lessing's range, the decision and completeness with which he did his work, his ceaseless efforts, and his power of passing, as if by a single step, from one field to another, withdrew him from the close and continuous scrutiny which may be the meed of more limited intelligences. He was always *so far in advance* and so active, that he did not seem so great as he really was to those that followed nearest to him. Like a true pioneer, he never rested on the soil he had cleared and prepared, but passed onward to remove other barriers. He has been called the "invisible presence in literature, like a magician working marvellous transformations though himself unseen;" and the figure is not inapt. More and more, as the literary historian and the philosophic critic pursue their way along the lines of modern development, after the manner of intrepid travellers trying to reach the sources of great rivers, Lessing's presence emphatically declares itself. No department of the field of culture but he cast seeds in—seeds that have struck root and grown and flowered, to the innocent delight even of "the dim, common populations" of to-day, who have never even heard his name. For he was no pedant, no dealer in scholastic subtleties, or wire-drawn refinements. He was a *man*, with healthy, frank, and generous impulses, if there ever was one. Even his faults leaned to the side of honesty, Spartan-like virtue, truthfulness, self-respect. Clear, exact, and cautious in his thinking; zealous, impetuous, and self-sacrificing in spirit, yet of a steady will, he was an enemy to every form of bigotry and prejudice, and ruthlessly exposed them, no matter how firmly intrenched behind privilege, influence, and courtly favour. It was one of his great merits that he saw and systematically illustrated the dependence of literature upon life and its simple unchanging conditions, as against artificialised reflections of it; and taught, under every form, the eternal lessons of charity, wise forbearance, and mutual goodwill. A man's dogmatic belief was of less account to him than his conduct: goodness and self-denial were themselves the essentials, of which dogmas were but the shields, or were worse than worthless; and he illustrated this theme in countless forms with such grace and efficiency as have never been surpassed. His motto was "Well-doing is the main thing, belief is secondary." "To patch up a system of religion before one has thought how to bring men to the harmonious discharge of their duties is an inane conceit," he urged. "Are two vicious dogs made good by being shut up in one kennel? It is not agreement in opinions, but agreement in virtuous actions that renders the world peaceful and happy."

His remarkable power of placing himself in the intellectual

attitude of another, and vicariously exhibiting relations that had been overlooked or but dimly apprehended, led to that peculiar, and, we might almost say, self-detached fairness of mind, which, in spite of his intensity and zeal, all his writings exhibit, and also imparted to his style that nervous natural directness and dramatic flexibility which could easily draw illustration from familiar phrase and idiom of every kind. He dealt with real experiences, and sought to read in their light every problem that presented itself. He was one of the most learned men of any time, but he knew that learning inevitably degenerates into pedantry and arid remoteness if not brought face to face with the stir of everyday life and corrected by it. His writings, however abstruse the subjects with which he deals, never smell of the study or the midnight oil; they are redolent of genial and healthy companionship; they hint constantly of the market-place or the coffee-house. To his friend Kleist, who had on one occasion confessed that when he walked out in the fields he went on "a hunt for images," Lessing said, "When you wish to refresh your mind, you take a walk in the country; I go to the coffee-house." Philosophy with him passed naturally into a kind of dialogue; and he loved to veil truth in fable, according to that instinct which led him to see that the "genius of each race brings forth its best products only when it works in harmony with the laws of its own nature, expressing without affectation the ideas and sympathies excited by immediate contact with the facts of life."

The two great defects in Lessing's nature were a total lack of phantasy and little love of nature, as is suggested by the reply to Kleist; but it is a question, on which hereafter we may have something to say, whether he could so efficiently have done the work he did had these elements been added to confirm, as they would no doubt have done, his irresolution in actual production, and to have increased his interests, which, as it was, were too many and urgent. His humour, of which his fables and epigrams show one aspect, and many of his sharp asides in controversy another, allied with his keen social instincts, tended to discourage the concentration that is aimed at and most admired by the mere student. Perhaps his defects in these respects were as helpful to him in accomplishing his great work as were his more positive endowments. And when this can colourably be said, certainly the man was suited to the times in which his lot was cast.

When Lessing appeared, both literature and the drama in Germany disregarded the conditions of the life around them, and dealt with an artificial and alien world. They were slavish imitations of French fashions, French rules; it was a kind of feeble posture-making and adapting—a patching of the garment into a coat of many colours. The learned world was

divided into two classes—courtiers who wrote French, and Academicians who wrote Latin ; whilst German remained “the language of horses.” Gottsched, a mere rhetorician, passed for a great poet. No one believed earnestly in the possibilities of the German nation or of the German tongue. It was adjudged utterly unfit ever to be a literary medium. In the capital of Prussia itself there was no German theatre. Patriotism, save as a narrow and purblind self-interest, was not understood. Lessing, who, as we have said, leant affectionately to the facts of real life in the very outset, felt that these were firm and sufficient—the true bases on which literature and art must turn or become frigid, inefficient, and affected. That was his mainstay, and the effort after it will be found to colour his developments and account for some of the more prominent faults of his earlier dramas. His greatest claim to our veneration and gratitude is, that though constantly tempted to pedantry, scholasticism, metaphysical refinement, as he was by one side of his intellect, his large human instincts always prevailed to impart to his work, even when the form of it was most deeply touched by this intellectual tendency, a generous reach of application, a universality and depth which render them enduring. The tendency to a severe, abstract, and formal method in him contended with and was corrected by an incisive but liberal and sympathetic view of life and society. By dint of unwavering application and self-denial he drew from both tendencies the best that they could yield. It was thus that, like the fairy in Eastern fable, transmuting by a touch the common metals to gold, Lessing informed the rude common speech with grace and beauty. And, while he exhibited the vigour and richness of his native tongue, he never forgot that art is not for art, but for humanity ; and so, in a time of weak commonplace, prejudice, and pretension, he became the herald of a world-literature. It is not too much to say that but for him Goethe’s field would have been limited ; Heine had been but half the poet he was ; and even Hegel had hardly been possible. Certainly the “Philosophy of History” had lacked some of its most striking points.

Lessing, therefore, was not only a great teacher, a reformer, a liberator, a witness for the ideal, alike in individual life and in the State, but he was a great creator, if not directly in the sphere of imagination and passion, yet in a field that contributes to that other most immediate and helpful elements. He knew that he did not possess the higher attributes of the poet, and modestly disclaimed inspiration ; but he was more of a poet than he claimed to be, else the lessons he taught could never have penetrated so deeply, nor the general taste have been so permanently raised through his effort and example. And he had to forge and polish the very instruments with which he did this great

work. Yet, notwithstanding all the adverse conditions with which he was called to contend in his endeavour to inaugurate a new order of things, in which fact and truth should stand for what they are, he was ever in spirit truly reverent and conservative. He never confused religion with the hateful parodies of it that theologians have put forth, nor ran the risk of being thought to sneer at the essential reality when he exposed the absurdities and pretences and logical contradictions amid which the dogmatists tried to fence themselves. To any one who thinks of Lessing as a mere sceptic, as one who sneeringly delights to subvert the basis of all belief, we should say, Read the two last letters to Goeze on "Bibliolatry." A revolutionary force of the most pronounced character indeed he was ; but he never cast down where he was not prepared in some measure to restore. He was often as wise in withholding his hand as in putting it forth. Here he differs from the "destroyers" with whom he is too often classed. He spoke of himself as an *amateur* theologian, on whom there did not fall the stress of systematising or rebuilding, but only of correcting sophistries and extreme positions. Still in his various theological writings there comes to view a simple body of doctrine, sufficient for the purposes of an upright and reverent life. His influence is becoming more potent as time passes on, mainly because of these simple but positive elements in his teaching. While the mere sceptics have fallen into the shade, he emerges more and more into the light, as communicating that which is useful, even amid the divisions and loud calls for reform and reconstruction which are now being raised. In this aspect, as in others, he has been almost as great a benefactor to England as to his native land. It is just, it is but right, that we should acknowledge what we owe to him. Several lengthened lives have appeared in Germany—among which those of Danzel, Guhrauer, Karl Lessing, and Stahr are most prominent. The latter has been translated in America. In these, Lessing's great services have been properly signalled in varying styles. Till now, nothing adequate has been done for Lessing in England. Mr. Carlyle had directed attention to him in his own effective way, as one who had much to attract Englishmen, and Mr. Lewes, with his usual sympathy and perception of heroic character, wrote of him with that subdued enthusiasm which he can so well command on fit themes. But to Mr. James Sime has been reserved the honour of presenting to the English public a full-length portrait of Lessing, in which no portion of the canvas is uncovered ; and in which there is hardly a touch but tells. He has studied his subject with that patient care which only reverence and sympathy can support ; he has attained the true proportion which can alone be gained by penetration and clear

insight into motive and purpose. Great was the theme, and one that demanded a steady hand. We can say that a clearer or more compact piece of biographic criticism has not been produced in England for many a day; in spite of one or two faults and omissions, to which we may afterwards refer, it casts quite into the shade anything of the same kind which has for the last dozen years been attempted in a similar direction amongst us. The gratitude of all who have the true interests of English literature at heart is due both to publisher and author for such a work as this, filling worthily, as it does, a great gap in our biographical list. With this valuable book in our hand, we shall glance briefly at the leading facts in the life of Lessing, then note some of his characteristics, and, finally, give prominence to some of the great lessons which are in our idea deducible from his works as theologian, poet, and critic.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was born in January 1729, in Kamenz, a small Lusatian town in Saxony, which, however, had greater traditions than some larger towns, being one of those that had wrung from the Emperors in the Middle Ages the rights of free cities. The Lessings had for long held respectable positions in Lusatia; some had even risen to be burgomasters. They had often shown great independence; and Gotthold's grandfather, in his thesis for his doctor's degree, defended the right to complete freedom of religious belief. Gotthold's father was also a Lutheran clergyman, and soon after the birth of the boy became pastor primarius. A good many of the father's traits reappear in the son. Though of a hasty temper, the pastor had great self-restraint; and though an orthodox Lutheran, he could afford to look at both sides of a theological question. And he was a good deal of a stoic. Leaving domestic matters entirely to his wife—a commonplace but energetic and affectionate woman—he was content with the simplest fare, and spent all the time that his duties allowed among his books. For he had been distinguished as a student, and had, not without reason, cherished hopes of being a professor, when fate drifted him to Kamenz and pastoral cares, and fixed him there for life. Gotthold soon showed an inclination to follow his father in his studious ways. As a mere boy his love of books was excessive. Tasks that were hard to others were easy to him: "He is a horse that must have double fodder," said his father. And this prematureness, it is clear, led to confidences that implied something of real companionship. The pastor would take little Gotthold aside and seriously urge him to begin early to watch and control his temper, saying, "Gotthold, take warning by me: be on your guard; for I have a fear

—I have a fear; and I would gladly see myself improved in you.” From the first dawning of his fine intellect it was agreed between husband and wife that Gotthold should be a clergyman, and his education was carefully superintended with this object in view.

In the summer of 1741 he was sent to the “Fürstenschule,” or Grammar School, of St. Afra, in Meissen, under a scholarship granted by the Carlowitz family. The discipline was strict, and Lessing, though reasonable and patient in many things even as a boy, was somewhat impatient of this kind of discipline. Though the constant pressure of trivial rules irked him, he made such progress as should have delighted the masters, but, it may be, sometimes only caused them concern. The usual period of residence was six years, but before the end of his fifth year Lessing had mastered all that he could learn there, and beseeched his father to release him from it. The pastor was at first much disinclined to this course, but finally consented.

Lessing had already written Latin verses and epigrams remarkable for their elegance and terseness, and had composed a few lyrics in German. His favourite authors were Plautus and Terence, whom to the end he loved to study, and from whom he early derived that taste for comedy which did much to determine his development as a dramatist. One of his boyish productions was a comedy—“Damon; or, True Friendship”—a time-worn theme enough, but enlivened in his treatment by touches of remarkable vivacity. He made a more ambitious endeavour in “Der Junge Gelehrte” (“The Young Student”), which he sketched during a short residence at Kamenitz, before he proceeded to the University of Leipzig to study theology. He was now in his eighteenth year.

The change to Leipzig was one that awakened new ideas, new hopes, dim possibilities, that urged him in many directions. But here, as in after years, we see the same clear purpose and energetic will, which, in spite of many temptations, sufficed to keep him in the right road—the road of true self-development. Here he fell into a congenial circle, prominent in which we see the odd, self-absorbed, eccentric Mylius,* and the frank and friendly Weisse, who was determined to complete a defective education

* “According to Karl Lessing, Mylius, with shoes down at heel, worn stockings, and tattered coat, was a familiar figure in the streets. As he was poor, friends would sometimes ask him to share their quarters, but they usually had abundant reason to regret their good nature, for he could never be brought to understand that he was not in every sense at home, and his habits did not commend themselves to a fastidious taste.”

[Vol. CIX. No. CCXV.]-NEW SERIES, Vol. LIII. No. I.

and to become a playwright. "Night after night," Mr. Sime says, "Lessing went to the theatre with his friend Weisse; and through the introduction of Mylius he was allowed behind the scenes, and soon became a daily companion of the actors, whose frank manner and freedom from conventional trammels delighted him. . . . The theatre became to him what his parents had intended the lecture-rooms of solemn theologians to be; and sometimes he even seriously thought of becoming an actor."

Naturally the class-books were thrown aside for the study of stage-plays; the passion for the theatre grew as it was indulged; and Lessing translated a play from the French merely that he might be placed upon the free list. His boyish plays were retouched and published in a journal edited by Mylius; and he wrote a play, "Die Alte Jungfer" ("The Old Maid"), and set about a tragedy. "The Young Scholar" was regarded as worthy of trial on the stage, and was put in rehearsal. By this time the news of how Gotthold was spending his time in Leipzig had reached his quiet home in Kamenz, and caused great consternation and distress there. To the simple pastor and his wife it seemed as though their eldest son—in whom all their hopes had centred—had broken loose and cast himself on the downward slope to ruin. Could they do anything to save him—to avert the awful catastrophe? Many proposals were discussed and rejected; and at last it was agreed that, at all hazards, they must get him home, that he might be reasoned with and warned as he could not otherwise be. A pious fraud was practised. A letter was written saying that his mother was seriously ill, and that he must come home to see her. He started off at once, and when he reached home all was clear to him. He was talked to by the pastor, but Lessing had something to say on his side; and when the good man saw that his son's moral character remained pure and unblemished, and that his love for belles-lettres had not caused him to neglect the sciences, he had the good sense to modify the tone in which he spoke of the theatre; and when Gotthold had written and read to the home circle a sermon to show that he could become a preacher any day, his mother's grief over his defection was perceptibly lessened.

Lessing returned to Leipzig. His father saw that it was now impossible that he could become a clergyman, but it was arranged that he should study medicine and philosophy with a view to his attaining a position at the University. He found it as impossible to study medicine as theology; the theatre claimed him, and he threw himself more energetically than ever into dramatic studies. Unfortunately for Lessing, circumstances led to the break-up of the company just when he was about

to finish a tragedy that Koch, the actor, had agreed to play in, and he made up his mind to leave Leipzig. He stayed for a short period at Wittenberg, where his younger brother was now a student; but he declares that this was a most miserable time. Young men do not indulge themselves in the "frank and unconventional" society of actors, and in the privilege of going "behind the scenes," without expenditure, even although very prudent and careful, which Lessing hardly was; and the results of his conduct in Leipzig soon followed him to Wittenberg in the shape of creditors clamorous for payment. As Wittenberg afforded small prospect of engagements, it was with pleasure that he heard from Mylius, who was now editing "Rüdiger's Gazette" in Berlin, that some work might be found for him there. To Berlin he accordingly went. He assisted Mylius a little, made some translations from the French, and wrote plays—a man without profession or fixed status. Once more his parents were in distress about him, and sent piteous appeals. Though Lessing was reduced to great shifts, finding that the shabby clothes of a poor scholar did not readily recommend him for profitable employment, he kept up a brave front to his parents. He acknowledges his position, speaks of his trials in a calm and manly way, and is firm in his justification of the course he has chosen; if he had but a better coat that he might present himself decently here and there, he is certain that he would succeed. And he meets the objections of his father one by one, and defends Mylius from aspersions.

"I see clearly that your hostile opinion of a man who, if he had never before shown me kindness, has done so now, exactly when it is most needed, is the principal reason why you are so much opposed to all my undertakings. It seems as if you considered him the horror of all the world. Does not this hatred go too far? . . . Have I, then, done so very ill in choosing for the work of my youth a department in which very few of my countrymen have yet exercised their energies? And would it not be foolish to stop before one has read masterpieces by me? I cannot comprehend why a writer of comedies should not also be a Christian. A writer of comedies is a man who depicts vice in its ridiculous aspects. May not a Christian laugh at vice? What if I promised to write a comedy which the theologians would not only read but praise? Would you think it impossible to fulfil the promise? *What if I wrote a comedy on the freethinkers and those who despise your office?*"

And with regard to creature comforts he disposes of that point easily at this time as afterwards: "I call comfort that which another would call penury. But what does it matter to me whether I have plenty or not, so that I live? As to my meals,

I have no sort of anxiety about them. I can procure a hearty meal for one groschen six pfennige" (three-halfpence).

So firmly and reasonably did Lessing urge his cause, and so impressed was the pastor by the manliness of his letters, that on receipt of this last he sent him nine thalers and a box containing some things he had left at home. It is to be presumed that now the household at Kamenz reconciled itself to the course he was taking. Even his eldest sister, who in her orthodox zeal had burned some of his dramatic fragments on that unexpected visit he paid to Kamenz, and was *coolly* punished for it, wrote very sisterly letters to him on his birthday. He had been recommended by Mylius for the work of arranging the library of his employer, Herr Rüdiger; and for this he received "free table" and a small sum of money. He also had the honour of translating some documents from French into German for the great Voltaire, to whom he was introduced, and has thus a remote connection with that Hirschel lawsuit which Mr. Carlyle has treated with such humorous touches in "Frederick." During the whole three years of his stay in Berlin at this time, Lessing lived with Mylius; and though there was little stimulus to dramatic production, he sketched several plays, some of which were afterwards elaborated and published.

The condition of things in Berlin at this time was very anomalous. A certain pretence of liberalism and enlightenment contended with the rankest bigotry and tyranny in high quarters. Frederick the Great regarded all religious earnestness as cant, and put a premium on open infidelity. The man whom Mr. Carlyle has attempted to canonise would gladly have stamped out religion altogether. Lessing saw clearly that danger was likely to result from court influence in this direction. He held up to ridicule the logic of the men who thought it a fine thing to attack orthodoxy in order to attract the notice of the King and gain favour. The love of fairplay was too strong in Lessing, and his logic even at this time was far too keen, to let him relish this kind of self-interested "enlightenment." When Lessing was reminded that he was free to write as he did through the toleration of the King, he replied that, as such toleration was yielded only that religion might be more freely attacked and the "newspapers made more interesting," as the King said, it might soon be a very disagreeable kind of toleration indeed, and that on principle he could not admire it. In this way, bigotry, under the mask of refinement in high places, developed bigotry without any mask in the Church. Orthodox preachers railed against the theatre because Frederick encouraged his French players; and strong tendencies were seen to be operating from both sides to defeat what had already risen as a

definite desire in the heart of Lessing—a really national German theatre.

Stahr tells us: "The theatrical profession was then an abomination to all pious persons. Even in the realm of the king of enlightenment, the clergy preached against Peter Hülferding, chief theatre-director of Prussia, who had been privileged by that monarch on his accession. Actors were even denied Christian burial. One must consider this state of feeling to be just to Lessing's father." We must keep this in view also to see how broad-minded he was when he had to deal with his refractory son, and how reasonably he came to view matters.

But other reflections suggest themselves. In midst of this privileged and pretentious freethinking, cruelties were practised, particularly toward the Jews, in a spirit more like that of the Middle Ages than of enlightened Germany in the eighteenth century. Frederick regarded the Jews as without the pale of citizenship or protection. It will ever remain a stigma on his character that here, where bright laurels might so easily have been won, he chose to be retrograde. Under his rule, we may say that the prejudice against the Jews in Germany was intensified instead of lessened. They were driven into the most disagreeable quarters of the cities, and treated with all kinds of ignominy. Every Jew was compelled to pay a heavy toll on his own body as he passed out and in at the city gates, as though he were indeed a chattel; he had protection from the magistrate for only one child, and could sue only in certain processes at law. The iron which then entered into the souls of this people has borne its fruits in many directions in literature. It gave a colour to the patience and dignity of men like Mendelssohn and Gumpertz; it was like an unseen feather on the shaft of Heine's bitterest irony. It was a bold thing for a young writer openly to confront prejudices that were so intense and so firmly shielded by royal favour. But Lessing never considered the value of secondary advantages; nor did he ever trumpet abroad his virtue in this respect, or try to make capital out of his independence. He directed a blow against the bigotry of freethinking in his "*Freigeist*," and against the treatment of the Jews in "*Der Juden*." It may be true that the purpose shows too clearly under the movement, and the chief characters are not so much created as "made to be admired;" but we cannot but respect his bravery in showing so forcibly that virtues could blossom among a people proscribed, and that the "freethinker," who holds priests in contempt merely because they *are* priests, may be illustrating the very temper which he is condemning in another, and missing sight of the possibilities of excellence where it ought, on his own principles, to be his greatest joy to find them. The

plot of "The Jews" is of the slightest, but the play is touched with great art here and there; and the parting of the Jew and the Christian baron—whose daughter he has saved, but who cannot be wedded to the son of a Jew, as had been proposed, when the fatal birth-mark has been exposed—is penetrated by vivid pathos. "The Freethinker," too, is undoubtedly feeble, heavy, and slow so far as movement is concerned. But the writer evidently did not aim at swiftness of movement; rather at emphasising the intolerance and insulting arrogance of the "freethinker," and the patient meekness and dignity of Theophanus, whom Lessing confessedly drew from his own father, as, indeed, the whole play is the redemption of that pledge he had half-humorously given to paint faithfully those who despised the priestly office. The man who could make his first start in literature thus boldly was not likely to become a court favourite and to receive pensions, or at any rate to retain them long, however much he might prove himself a poet and critic and re-creator of literature. In "The Jews" we have the seed that finally blossomed into "Nathan."

Of these early performances Danzel says well: "The astonishing thing is, that the young man of twenty-two was able to place himself with such freedom, firmness, and adroitness above both of the parties, to one of which at that time every one must belong as by a Solon's law."

In the end of 1750 Mylius had quarrelled with Rüdiger, and Lessing, who declined to become editor of the "Gazette" in his stead, agreed to contribute regularly critical articles as he had done before. This connection may be said to have inaugurated his career as a critic, and has thus a special significance, claiming more attention than the other plays which Lessing sketched or wrote at this time—among others, "Der Schatz" ("The Treasure") and "Weiber sind Weiber" ("Women are Women").

In the end of 1751, Lessing resolved to leave Berlin for a time, for two reasons. The first was that his dramatic impulses so lacked stimulus that production failed him; and the second, that he desired to make further study of some things which he regarded as essential to his outfit as a critic, and which he could study better in Wittenberg than in Berlin. To Wittenberg he accordingly betook himself, and went through a very extensive course of reading—more especially in the Latin authors. He also composed many epigrams and lyrics; but he also sent abroad some witnesses of his critical acumen, as Jöcher and others only too keenly felt. This retreat to Wittenberg also is noteworthy for the second association into which it brought Lessing and Voltaire. Lessing had borrowed a book belonging to Voltaire from a friend, M. de Louvain, Voltaire's secretary, and either

forgetfully, or fancying that he might without injury or annoyance to others retain it for a time, took it away with him. When Voltaire found this out, he got angry, stormed at Louvain, and wrote in high dudgeon to Lessing, who answered him in such a manner as he hardly expected; but Voltaire afterwards had his revenge.

Having accomplished what he desired by a stay at Wittenberg, Lessing returned to Berlin at the end of 1752. This second residence in Berlin was notable for the friendship that was then begun between Lessing and Mendelssohn and Nicolai, which left results in many ways. Lessing at once set himself to translation—his unfailing resource in those earlier days—and resumed his connection with the "Gazette," which had now passed into the hands of Rüdiger's son-in-law, and had become better known as the "Voss'sche Zeitung," showing a clearness and mastery of his topics that astonished his readers. He attacked Gottsched, but he also treated of Pope as a metaphysician, and defended Horace Walpole, thus indicating that he had recently made extensive excursions in the field of English literature. More to the purpose, he prepared and published a selection from his writings, which, though it was unfortunately a failure in point of sale, gained him friends and admirers. Coincidentally with these labours, however, he had pursued his dramatic studies; and after having retired to Potsdam, and "shut himself up for seven weeks in a garden-house" there, as Kleist wrote, he finished "Miss Sara Sampson." This drama more fully exhibits the effect of his recent studies in English literature during his stay at Wittenberg, and indicates a final escape from French influence. Richardson's "Clarissa" and Moore's "Gamester" may have had a share in suggesting it. "Miss Sara Sampson" is now banished from the German stage; but no student of Lessing can pass it by without a careful and reverent reading, because it marks a definite point in Lessing's dramatic career, and also forms a turning-point in the history of the German drama. By "Miss Sara Sampson," it is not too much to say that Lessing freed the tragedy of common life from the prosaic criminal element, and discovered tragical conflicts peculiar to its situations. By penetrating into the interior of family life, into the depths of the perplexities of individual souls, he obtained also for the lower sphere of human action an arena wherein the absolute worth, and freedom, and sovereignty of the individual could assert themselves. This field is the family. For only in the relations of the family and the affections of the heart can the man whose capacities as a citizen are narrowly circumscribed appear as a sovereign, a hero.

It is easy to see that the theory on which Lessing wrote this

play would have injurious results if pressed to extremes. It would transform all drama strictly into domestic drama ; and there is a good reason why, since scenic effect is a necessary part of dramatic art, some value should be attached to variety of accessories. But Lessing's theory is intelligible enough, as he put it, in this fashion : "The sufferings of those *whose misfortunes approach nearest to our own must naturally penetrate deepest into our souls*, and if we would sympathise with kings, it would be as with men and not as with kings,"—an idea which has its counterpart in a remarkable utterance of Dr. Johnson ; but what is true of real life itself is not in the same way true of the stage, whose main business it is to create illusions by means of which distinctions that effectively prevail in real life disappear or are modified under demands of sympathy.

It is with a peculiar reluctance that one circumstance must be mentioned with reference to this second residence in Berlin : Lessing, in spite of all his efforts, was in such dire need that he had unwillingly to accept aid from Mendelssohn and Kleist—kindnesses which he never forgot.

In 1755, "Miss Sara Sampson" was acted at Frankfort-on-the-Oder, and thither Lessing went to superintend the preparations. He was tired of his life in Berlin, which had led to nothing fixed and certain in the way of income, while the excess of court influence was more and more uncongenial to him. He now, therefore, resolved for a second time to try Leipzig, whither he went, and where he renewed his intercourse with Weisse. He was desirous to see "Miss Sara Sampson" on the Leipzig stage ; but he was disappointed in this, for it was not produced there till 1756, in an abridged form, under Weisse's hand. With his customary good-humour, he writes to Mendelssohn that, if the public would but give him one hearing, it would not see or hear anything of him for the next three years. He had been invited by Professor Sulzer to go as travelling companion with him for the next three years, and had consented. They set out in May of 1756. Their intentions were to go to Holland, and from that, after some time, to pass over into England. Lessing greatly enjoyed his residence in Holland ; but the tour was stopped through the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, and they returned to Leipzig. Notwithstanding the stir in Leipzig through the presence of the soldiery, Lessing, in the winter of 1756-57, confessed himself "bored ;" but he translated some English works, and must have been relieved and cheered when Kleist had joined the army there. The friendship which Lessing had formed with Kleist in Berlin soon ripened into the most ardent attachment, now that they were often together. For a time Lessing lived

with Kleist, and through him formed acquaintances, some of which were to prove useful to him afterwards.

Owing to a tedious lawsuit in which he was unfortunately involved, and the departure of Kleist after the battle of Rossbach to take charge of a military hospital, Lessing resolved in 1757 to return to Berlin. He carried with him the first sketch of "*Emilia Galotti*," which many critics regard as the finest of his works. A warm welcome was given him by Mendelssohn, Nicolai, and Ramler. His first work here was the issue of a volume of epigrams by Logan, in conjunction with Ramler, who, before the task was done, had reason to complain of Lessing's dilatoriness. The introduction, which Lessing had undertaken to furnish, was not forthcoming till long after the date fixed; but Ramler, though chagrined, excused him by saying, "I cannot take it very ill of our friend: he has ten irons in the fire at once." The "*Literary Letters*," which were now started in association with Mendelssohn and Nicolai, had a remarkable influence. They were addressed to a soldier supposed to be wounded in the war—in a word, to Kleist. Though Lessing, in adopting the tone that he took in these letters, in some degree sought to adapt himself to the temper of the time that he might the better gain a hearing, he discussed the most varied topics with such clearness, calmness and suggestiveness, as make them still entertaining reading. Nowhere did he ever hit home more directly, or rise more easily from the topics of the moment to universal principles, throwing in efficiently the most forcible and familiar illustrations. "We are in presence of a man, not of a mere book; one who has before him, as he writes, the living men into whose minds he desires to cast seed from the harvest that has slowly ripened in his own."

He wrote also on the question of education, with reference to Wieland's utterances on the subject; he presented analyses of Shakespeare's plays, showing such an appreciation of their deeper qualities as was very uncommon in that day; illustrated the need of childhood for the element of mystery in education, and discussed acutely the nature and true form of the fable. It is very characteristic of Lessing that, in speaking of some passages in Wieland's collection of prose writings called "*Experiences of the Christian*," he should point out that these experiences, "which, since they are those of the Christian, ought to have been those of all Christians, were mere exercises of an individual fancy that left the heart empty and cold." In the course of this criticism there occur expressions which might almost be presumed to have suggested that whole section of Hegel's "*Æsthetic*" in which he deals with the ideals that are wrought out by the poet

in isolation and apart from humanity and common interests, and ruthlessly condemns them.

Lessing, too, has much to say in answer to Cramer, who had laid down a theory of education based on the idea of proceeding strictly from simple to complex truth, with the practical application that a child ought first to be taught, not that Christ is the second person of the Trinity, but that He is an example of virtue and a high moral teacher, and that the way would thus be prepared for the reception of dogma. "Lessing," as Mr. Sime well puts it, "offers no opinion as to the propriety of giving any sort of instruction in religion; but he very decidedly states his conviction that Cramer's idea is based on a wholly mistaken theory of human nature. Childhood, he points out—not without a slight touch of sarcasm—is the age at which the mind most readily accepts mystery; and if plain truths alone are then taught, the difficulty of accepting mystery afterwards is increased, since the Socinian and the orthodox conceptions of Christianity are not related to each other as simple and complex, the former conducting to the latter, but are two opposed systems of belief." Lessing is never the logician merely, but delights in regarding human nature in its entire tendencies and needs; and his caution here is as noticeable as his acuteness.

Lessing's relations with Kleist gradually shaped themselves into a delicate but pathetic idyl of friendship, and cannot here be passed by. Smarting under the neglect of the King, Kleist had eagerly sought opportunity to show what spirit was in him, and accepted the first opening for service in the field. At the battle of Kunersdorf he exposed himself after he should have retired, and died either of his wounds or through neglect. The moment Lessing learned that Kleist had been wounded and was taken prisoner, he wrote to him; and as he knew that he would be completely stripped by the Russians, he arranged with Mendelssohn, Nicolai, and Ramley that money should be remitted to him in Frankfort; and in case he should be brought to Russian Poland, in Dantzic. He wrote to all his friends in Frankfort, and to some in Dantzic, commending Kleist to their attention and care. He had even determined to go to Frankfort, though the city was full of the enemy, to seek his friend. "If he still lives, I will seek him out," said Lessing. "Shall I never see him again? Shall I never more in my life speak with him and embrace him?"

He had made his arrangements; but before he could start, the doubt became certainty—Kleist—"our Kleist"—had died. Lessing thus wrote to Gleim on the 6th of September:—

"Alas! dear friend, it is too true. He is dead. We have him no more. He died in the house and in the arms of Professor Nicolai.

He was always calm and cheerful, even in the greatest pain. He greatly longed to see his friends again. Would that it had been possible! My sorrow over this event is a very wild sorrow. I do not indeed demand that the balls should have taken another direction because an honest man stood in their path; but I do demand that the honest man——. See, frequently grief leads me to be angry with him whom it concerns. He had already three, four wounds; why did he not go? Generals with fewer and slighter wounds have retired from the field without dishonour. He wished to die. Forgive me if I am in excess in speaking of him. It is said that he would not have died if he had not been neglected! Neglected! I know not on whom I should take vengeance! The wretches, to neglect him! Professor Nicolai has pronounced his funeral oration; another, I know not whom, has written an elegy upon him. They cannot have lost much in Kleist who can do that now. The Professor intends to publish his oration; it is all so pitiful! I know certainly that Kleist would have preferred to take another wound with him into the grave rather than to have such stuff babbled after him. Has a professor really a heart? He desires now to have verses from Ramler and me to print with his oration. If he has desired the same of you, and you gratify his desire——. Dearest Gleim, you must not do it! You will not do it! At present you feel too much to be able to say what you feel. And it is not all the same to you, as it is to a professor, what you say and how you say it.”

The difference between the characters of Kleist and Lessing—the one so full of sentiment and impulse, the other apparently so remote from sentiment, and obedient to the demands of reason alone—intensifies the sympathy we must feel with Lessing here; and when we know that he was at this period hard pressed both for time and money, his devotion to Kleist comes out in the stronger and more pleasing light.

The peculiar cosmopolitanism which coloured Lessing's patriotism had often so severely tried his loyal friends that there can be little doubt they gladly welcomed any signs of a more reasonable, and, as they would have said, more reliable patriotism. Sometimes he had despised Prussia and exalted his native Saxony; sometimes he appeared exactly to reverse the position; and yet again he seemed to regard all such distinctions and conflicting interests as not only indifferent but mischievous. On these matters he spoke from the mood of the moment, and usually had in his mind considerations not usually regarded as pertaining to any political ideas. Recently he seemed to have reached more fixed and sensible views. Lowositz, Prague, and Rossbach had been fought, and he felt that Frederick had struck a blow for Protestantism and intellectual freedom against Austrian Jesuitism and Russian barbarism, as well as for the

honour of Germany against the vanity and pretension of the French. This, however, was but a passing feeling; there was much that was pretty certain soon to qualify it in the way in which Frederick exercised at home the power that he had won.

Meanwhile Lessing paid his tribute to the patriotic idea as presented in the career of Kleist. A high artistic end was also to be served. He wished to show that he could write a drama, moving by swift action to its climax through a series of striking situations, and at the same time embody a high lesson without such moral reflection or formal teaching as had characterised his previous works. The result was "*Philotas*," a prose tragedy in one act. The hero is the son of a Grecian king, and is taken prisoner by Aridæus, the enemy of his country, whilst the son of Aridæus shares the same fate in the opposite camp. *Philotas* knows that the great end he has cherished will be sacrificed through his father's excessive love for him, and that if an exchange of prisoners is proposed he will at once accede to it that he may redeem his son from the enemy's hands. He therefore sends a message to his father, telling him to demand for the extradition of the prince the surrender of the point that had originally caused the war, and intimates that by the time the note is read this will have become the only wise course of action, since the writer of it will have ended his life in order to ensure it. The play is worked up with great skill from point to point; and *Philotas*, half boy, half hero, is indeed a fine creation. The man who stood as the original of that character was at once a great man and a good man, worthy to rank with the heroes of olden times. Lessing has thus fragrantly preserved record of the noble character of Kleist. "*Philotas*" is also remarkable for the commanding interest it maintains wholly independent of the sentiment of sexual love.

While living with Kleist at Leipzig Lessing had formed the acquaintance of Colonel Tauentsein, who was enabled at this time to do him a service. By his heroic defence of the capital of Silesia against superior numbers, Tauentsein had attracted the eye of Frederick. He was raised to the rank of general, and made governor of Breslau. Tauentsein, in midst of his administrative duties, greatly wanted the help of a capable and trustworthy secretary. He offered the appointment to Lessing, who gladly accepted it, saying to his friends half playfully that "nothing in particular drove him from Berlin," but he wanted change. Though his official work did not make such demands upon his time as to render production impossible, he wrote little of value during his stay in Breslau, though he collected a good library. Unfortunately, the passion for gambling—his one great

weakness—again asserted its power over him. He said that it relieved him from depression. He fell as if under a fascination: the General warned him, reprimanded him, though always maintaining the attitude of a friend. Whilst he might have amassed a fortune through certain doubtful “mint” operations, Lessing was spending his salary as he got it, sometimes doing imprudently charitable actions; and when five years later he left Breslau, on Tauentsein being appointed governor of Silesia, he returned to Berlin a poorer man than he had left it.

During his residence in Breslau the Professorship of Eloquence at the University of Königsberg was offered to him, which, had it been accepted, would have made him a colleague of Kant; but he declined it on the very characteristic ground that he could not deliver an oration in honour of the reigning sovereign, which was one of the duties of the office.

It is doubtful if Lessing would have turned to Berlin at this time had it not been that his friends were hopeful they might secure for him the appointment of librarian to the King. But Frederick remembered too many things he had heard of Lessing—Voltaire’s reports may have been forgotten, but the talk about Lessing’s sayings that seemed disloyal were remembered—and he would not listen to the proposal, preferring to accept the services of an illiterate valetudinarian from Paris. The spirit in which the King treated the mention of Lessing affords too good ground for the manner in which afterwards Schlegel inveighed against him, for failing to perceive the merits of men like Lessing and Winckelmann, or to aid them in any way. Turning hopelessly from the idea of help in that quarter, Lessing now devoted himself to the composition of “*Minna von Barnhelm*”—the most powerful and popular of his comedies, in which he dealt with a contemporary theme drawn from an episode in the Seven Years’ War—to the “*Laocoon*,” and to contributions to “*Die Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*” (“*The General German Library*”), of which Nicolai was now editor and publisher. “*Minna von Barnhelm*” is a genuine comedy, and has been called the first national comedy, and the only one. It shows great power in imparting to ordinary facts and experiences a vivid ideal interest.

Lessing was now past thirty-seven, still without any assured source of income. “I stood idle in the market-place then,” he said afterwards, “and nobody would hire me, doubtless because nobody knew what use to put me to.” The atmosphere of Berlin was less likely than ever to attract him, for the success of the Seven Years’ War had produced an effusive vanity and superciliousness, and added to that now was the sense of personal slight. When, therefore, it was proposed to him by

Löwen, a bookseller of Hamburg, to go there as director of a national theatre, he willingly accepted the offer. The company, however, did not receive the support that was expected; and it was not so much on account of his work at the theatre as on the issue of the "*Hamburgische Dramaturgie*," which was begun in connection with it, that Lessing's residence in Hamburg has become historical. Earnestly as he had cherished the idea of a truly national theatre, he was now very bitterly to charge himself with having been too sanguine.

"One might almost say," he wrote, "that the moral character of the Germans is—the resolve to have no moral character of their own. We are still the sworn imitators of everything foreign, especially the humble admirers of the never enough to be admired French. Everything from beyond the Rhine is beautiful, charming, lovely, divine even; we would rather disown sight and hearing than think otherwise; we will make ourselves take coarseness for naturalness, insolence for grace, grimace for expression, a jingling of rhymes for poetry, howling for music, rather than in the smallest degree doubt the superiority which this amiable people, this first people in the world, as it is accustomed to call itself, in everything that is good and beautiful and sublime and becoming, has received for its share from just Destiny."

The man who dealt by the literature of his own country with such terrible frankness as this was not likely to be a favourite in most circles. And he does not content himself with merely negative charges:—

"The best that we Germans have as yet produced are a few *Essays* of young men. Nay, our pedantry is so great that we consider young men as the only proper fabricators of theatrical wares. Men have more serious and worthy employment in the State and in the Church. What men write should beseeem the gravity of men; a compendium of law or philosophy, an erudite chronicle of this or that imperial city, or edifying sermon, and such like. This solemn pedantry being, and having long been, so fashionable amongst us, let us not be surprised that our elegant literature stands so far behind—I will not say the literature of the ancients, but the literature of all cultivated people; say what we will, it has a *puerile* and childish cast in the middle of the eighteenth century, and will, I fear, long retain it. *Blood and life, colour and fire*, we have in some measure at last, but pith and nerve, marrow and bone, are sadly deficient."

The "*Dramaturgie*" is, as Mr. Sime has said, one of the most remarkable contributions ever made to the culture of a people. The great need for such teaching and the disinclination to receive it, only make the testimony the more remarkable, and show both the genius and the daring of the writer in the more striking light. Lessing will, for one thing, give French taste no quarter.

He exposes the superficiality in the masterpieces of Voltaire ; in considering the essential qualities of the comic character, he finds the French types are thin, superficial, conventional ; he contrasts the villains of Shakespeare with those of Corneille and Racine, only to the disadvantage of the French writers. And in his hands French tragedy fares no better. His close, careful study of the actor's art is testified in almost every essay. Everywhere he brought practice to a test in the clearest critical principles ; and his arguments were unanswerable here as in other departments, as no doubt poor Klotz felt before he escaped from Lessing's hands, after he had ventured to impugn the statement that the ancient painters did not attempt to represent Homer with pictorial exactness.

Though calm and unexcitable, Lessing was apt to be sanguine over new schemes ; and here, unfortunately, he had been led to join in a printing enterprise along with one Bode. He was hopeful that the issue of his own works, in which the interest was increasing, would form a nucleus, and that others would employ them. The business did not succeed. Lessing had to sell his library, which he had collected with much labour and expense, for a few hundred thalers, and after all little was done to clear off the debts.

Several efforts were again made by Lessing's friends to find a post suitable for him, but without success. At one time it was hoped that he might have been made director of a great national theatre at Vienna, which the Emperor had projected with the idea of carrying away *éclat* from Berlin ; but the scheme never came to anything. At last he was put in charge of the extensive library founded by the Duke of Brunswick at Wolfenbüttel. Lessing's name is henceforth identified with Wolfenbüttel. He keenly felt the change from the bustling life and the varied society of Hamburg to this dull, sleepy little town, with its grim wall around it, set in the midst of its flat marshy meadows. Its solitude severely tried him. Only the visits that he now and then paid to friends in Brunswick made it endurable. His labours were hard and uncongenial ; but he applied himself faithfully, and he was rewarded by one or two discoveries. Among a heap of books in the Wolfenbüttel library he was so lucky as to alight on a copy of the lost answer of Berengarius to Lanfranc. At first he thought of publishing it, but changed his purpose, and devoted the whole summer of 1770 to writing a book upon it. Then he resumed "*Emilia Galotti*"—the story of Virginius cast among modern Italian conditions—which had been thrown aside after his disappointment with theatrical matters at Hamburg ; and he composed his volume upon epigrams, of which Mr. Sime has given a valuable summary, though

we half expected to find there some specimens by way of illustration from Lessing himself, such as are to be found, with a good deal else of interest, in Möhnike's "Lessingiana," to which we do not see that Mr. Sime has referred. Here are a few:—

"Ein einzig böses Weib lebt höchstens in der Welt,
Nur schlimm, dass jeder seins für dieses einz'ge hält."
(There is but one bad woman! With a groan
Each one assents, and thinks that one his own.)

"Verse wie sie Bassus schreibt
Werden unvergänglich bleiben;
Weil dergleichen Zeug zu schreiben
Stets ein Stumper übrig bleibt."
(That poems such as these can die
My credence quite surpasses;
There ne'er can be a lack of men
To write themselves down asses.)

The monostich given by Möhnike is very perfect in its own way:—

"GRABSCHAFF AUF EIN GEHENKTE.

"Hier ruht er, wenn der Wind nicht weht."
(He rests in peace when the winds do cease.)

And so also is the

"GRABSCHAFF AUF KLEIST.

"O Kleist! dein Denkmal diese Stein
Du wirst des Steines Denkmal seyn."
(O Kleist! this stone a monument to thee!
'Thou wilt, indeed, the stone's memorial be.)

The following show his way of celebrating brother poets:—

"You ask why poet Scmi, he whom all men praise, should be
A miser rich? , Because true poets starve, is Fate's decree."

"The reason why this cunning Jew failed in his knavery
Is simply that a cleverer knave he found in Monsieur V."

Voltaire had obtained a decision against a Jew celebrated for his sharpness and trickery.

"TO THE READER.

"Who will not mighty Klopstock praise?
Will everybody read him? Nay!
A little less extol our lays,
And read a little more, we pray."

The following, written in an album which had for design on the cover a cross, has its point:—

"Here will I lie! for here, when life has ceased,
I'll have, if not a stone, a cross at least."

Lessing's genius, clear, precise, and direct, found a sphere in this kind of composition.

The Wolfenbüttel library was so excellent that it made up for many drawbacks. Lessing wrote to his father: "I can now very well forget my books, which I have been compelled to sell. I should like one day to have the pleasure of conducting you about here, for I know what a great lover and connoisseur of books of all kinds you are." But Lessing never had this pleasure; the pastor died a few months after that note was written, having suffered much in his later years from narrow means. It grieved Lessing that he could not give more efficient help. Though still in debt, he now generously took upon himself all his father's pecuniary responsibilities, and made serious sacrifices to help his mother and sister. For some time he thought of composing a memorial of his father, which, as he wrote to his mother, "one would read elsewhere than in Kamenz and longer than six months after the funeral." The plan, however, was not realised.

About this time "*Emilia Galotti*" was acted in Brunswick with splendid success. Its dramatic force and fine insight, especially in the character of the Prince, were admitted on all sides; and though Lessing did not go to see it so long as Döbbelin acted in it, he was cheered by the reports of the impressions which it produced. Goethe said that "it rose like the island of Delos from the sea of works like those of Gottsched, Gellert, and Weisse, in order to receive softly a goddess in labour."

This was but a glimmer of sunshine through overhanging clouds. Solitude and want of means so depressed him, that in an evil moment he was tempted to try the lottery, as formerly he had fallen into gambling. The hope of relieving himself by a lucky stroke from those debts contracted in Hamburg was the great inducement. These, though they amounted to no more than a thousand thalers, greatly tried him. There is every reason to believe, indeed, that had it not been for these debts, and his engagement to Eva König, the widow of a friend in Hamburg, he would have escaped from the shackles of his librarianship, and devoted himself to finishing several works which he had projected or begun. Eva König, too, was unfortunately in difficulties. Her husband's business had been found at his death to be in great disorder, and as the only means of saving something for herself and her children out of the wreck, it was necessary that she should carry it on and superintend it for some years. The letters that passed between her and Lessing during these years of waiting are models of what such letters should be. We see in her an upright, self-respecting, supremely sensible, and deeply affectionate woman, to whom duty stood for

so much, that we cannot for a moment credit what Stahr has said, that Lessing's passion for her was entertained before her husband's death. To his brother Karl he wrote afterwards in reference to her: "If I assure you that I consider her the only woman in the world with whom I could trust myself to live, you will readily believe that she has everything I seek for in a wife. If I am not happy with her, I should certainly have been much more unhappy with any other."

At last, after a long probation of six years, she was able to intimate that her affairs were so far arranged that she could fulfil her engagement with Lessing. Now that she was ready, there came other causes for delay. One of them arose from the circumstance that the young Prince asked Lessing to travel with him in Italy. Lessing hesitated, but, on the point being referred to Eva König, she said she could not selfishly stand in the way of so much pleasure for him. There were reasons of policy too; his going might improve their position at Wolfenbüttel. "What we long for in youth," says one, "age freely gives us." So it seemed to be with Lessing now. Often had he desired to go to Italy, and at last he was to behold it—the fulfilment of a youthful dream, with a further dream of happiness beyond it. Lessing deeply enjoyed, as he could hardly fail to do, the treasures of Italian art. On his return he was married in the quietest manner possible, and settled down to enjoy what of life remained to him. But the sunshine was not to last long. He had but tasted the draught when the cup was dashed from his lips, verifying his own expression, "*I have had no luck!*" His wife, whose comprehension of his purposes and sympathy with his many-sided mind were as remarkable as her prudence and practical tact, died within a week after the birth of their first child. They had only been married fourteen months. The blow to Lessing was terrible. His spirit seemed to be crushed and broken. He wrote with the stoical calm that comes of the feeling that no greater trial need be apprehended. This is how he intimates to his friend Eschenburg at Brunswick the birth of his son and his wife's illness:—

"I seize the moment in which my wife lies without consciousness to thank you for your kind interest. My pleasure was but brief. And I lost him so unwillingly, this son. For he had so much understanding! so much understanding! Do not suppose that the few hours of my fatherhood have made me an ape of a father! I know what I say. Was it not understanding that they had to drag him into the world with iron tongs, that he so soon suspected the evil of it? Was it not understanding that he seized the first opportunity to get away from it? And the little rascal tears his mother from me with him! For there is small hope that she will be preserved to me. I

wished to have things as well as other men. But I have badly succeeded."

A week of uncertainty followed, during which the strong man could do nothing, but walked about, absent and aimless, when he was not at her bedside. He had to write at last to Eschenburg thus:—

"My wife is dead; this experience, too, is now mine. I am glad there cannot be many more such trials left for me to go through, and I am entirely calm. It also does me good to feel assured of your sympathy and that of the rest of our friends at Brunswick.—Yours,

"Wolfenb., 10th January 1778.

LESSING."

It is in such a crisis as this that we see most decidedly what spirit a man is of. Lessing impresses us by the sincerity of his sorrow; the depths of his passionate grief are revealed to us by the very restraints of expression. He is calm, but it is a calmness like that of his Laocoon.

During his residence in Hamburg Lessing had formed a friendship with the distinguished scholar Reimarus, and on the professor's death some of his papers were put into Lessing's hands by his widow. Amongst these was a series of papers entitled "An Apology for the Rational Worshippers of God." Lessing, by special privilege, was free from the restrictions of censorship in so far as publishing matter from documents in the library was concerned, and under cover of this right he issued some chapters from Reimarus's manuscripts, giving them forth as by "an anonymous writer." In these "Fragments" (which afterwards became famous as the "Wolfenbüttel Fragments" through the controversies they aroused) the inconsistency of several of the orthodox positions was exposed with a logical acumen and felicity of style alike remarkable; it was declared also that the historical evidence in favour of revelation lost weight as time passed on; that no faith could be adapted to all races of men alike; and that the contradictions in the Evangelists on the resurrection were really insuperable when the subject was critically examined. The first few "Fragments" produced little or no impression, but a fifth, which had been issued at a long interval, just before the death of his wife, excited a great deal of interest, and called forth several replies from Schumann, Röss, and others. One of them by Goeze, a Lutheran clergyman, has thrown all the others into the shade, simply because Lessing answered it. It was more an attack on Lessing than a grave and deliberate discussion of the points raised, and was couched in such a style as made a reply necessary. Goeze charged Lessing with saying that it was impossible to meet the objections raised by the

"Fragments," and insinuated that Lessing was himself the author, whereas it was very characteristic of Lessing that in the notes which he added he distinctly said that he had annotated the "Fragments" and published them for the purpose of exciting discussion and eliciting truth. He had, in fact, in the notes, contested several of the positions taken by the writer, and had, when dealing with particular objections of Reimarus, so obtrusively seemed to make common cause with the orthodox against him, as to have brought representations from at least one of his friends. Goeze's style stung Lessing into action. This was the origin of the celebrated "Letters to Goeze," or "Anti-Goeze," so often referred to by Lessing's critics and biographers.

It was at the death-bed of his wife that Lessing received the first attack of Goeze. He went from her grave into the theological arena; and it was perhaps a happy thing that duty and honour alike laid this charge upon him. To natures like his, reticent, intense, and faithfully observant of the true laws of modesty* in the expressions of affection or of grief, the only anodyne is complete preoccupation of the mental powers. We are told that immediately after the death of his wife he sometimes had thoughts of casting off the existence that now seemed to him only a dreary burden; and we can easily believe that the duty laid upon him by Goeze had its own remedial effect. These letters to Goeze form at once an admirable illustration of argumentative dexterity and of severe honesty of mind. He enlightens the most abstract points by metaphors drawn from common life. He is serious, satirical, severe, and playful by turns, and he lightens up the theme by skilful repartee, delicious banter, and fables that are almost perfect for sly humour and suggestiveness. Never probably was theological argument made so trenchant and familiar, so penetrated by varied knowledge, so transfigured by humour and keen graceful irony. And through it all the poor, thin, peevish personality of Goeze presents itself, like a fly in amber—a personality which else had been forgotten or disregarded. We have often wondered whether Mr. Matthew Arnold did not learn some of his tricks of theological banter from these letters; such passages as the following, in one of the earlier letters (where Lessing is defending himself from the suggestion of using the privilege of his position as librarian

* "Not to unveil before the gaze
Of an imperfect sympathy
In aught we are, in aught we feel,
Is the main sum of modesty."

—COVENTRY PATMORE.

ruthlessly to do despite to the truth), almost make us believe it:—

‘ “A pastor is one thing,” he writes, “a librarian another. Their names differ not more in *sound* than their duties and obligations differ in nature. In one word, the pastor and the librarian stand, to my thinking, in the same relation as the shepherd and the botanist.

“The botanist wanders over hill and dale, and carefully examines forest and field, in hope that he may find some little herb to which Linnæus has not given any name. And how it gladdens his heart if he finds one! Little does he care whether the plant be poisonous or no! He reasons that if poisons are not useful (and who will assert that they may not be so?), yet surely it is useful that the poisons be known.

“But the shepherd knows only the herbs of his own ‘run;’ and those only he values and cultivates which agree with his sheep and are liked by them.

“So it is with us, reverend man! I am the keeper of library treasures; and I would not willingly be the dog in the manger, nor would I willingly be the stable-boy who brings hay to the rack for every hungry horse. If I find among the treasures intrusted to me anything that is not generally known, I give full notice of it. First, I place it in our catalogues; then by degrees, as I find it aids in filling gaps, or in setting matters right, by publishing it. I am indifferent whether one person declare it important and another unimportant, whether it edify one and scandalise another. Useful and hurtful are as much relative ideas as great and small.

“You, on the other hand, reverend sir, value literary treasures only by their influence on your congregation, and would rather be too anxious than too indifferent. What matters to you whether a thing be known or unknown, if it might be a stumbling-block to the least of those intrusted to your spiritual care?

“Quite right! and I commend you for it, reverend sir. But while I commend you for doing your duty, pray, do not scold me for doing mine; or, which is really the same thing, for thinking I do it.

“You would tremble before your dying hour if you had taken the least part in publishing the fragments in question!

“I perhaps shall tremble in my dying hour; *before* it I shall never tremble. Least of all for having done what all men of sense now wish the ancient librarians had done, if possible, with the writings of Celsus, Fronto, and Porphyry in the libraries of Alexandria, Cæsarea, and Constantinople. A man well informed in these matters says: ‘For the writings of Porphyry not a few friends of religion in our day would willingly give in exchange a pious father of the Church.’ . . .

“Christianity moves on with its own eternal gradual pace; eclipses do not bring the planets out of their path. But the sects of Christianity are the phases of it, and could not subsist in any other fashion than by the stoppage of the whole course of nature, when sun, planets,

and observer continue at the same point. God protect us from such awful stagnation as this!

"Therefore, reverend man, censure me less severely for having been so honest as to rescue from oblivion, not only a very Christian work of Berengarius,* but also some very anti-Christian fragments."

When he comes quite to close quarters with Goeze, he thus summarises and lays down in ten propositions the leading points:—

"1. The Bible obviously contains more than belongs to religion.

"2. It is a mere hypothesis that it is equally infallible as regards this excess.

"3. The letter is not the spirit, and the Bible is not religion.

"4. Objections to the letter of the Bible are consequently not also objections to the spirit and to religion.

"5. There was a religion before there was a Bible.

"6. Christianity existed before the Evangelists and Apostles had written. Some time had elapsed before the first of them wrote, and a very considerable time before the canon was completed.

"7. However much, therefore, may depend upon these writings, the whole truth of the Christian religion cannot possibly rest upon them.

"8. If there was a period when Christianity had taken possession of many souls, and when, notwithstanding, not a single letter of what we now hold as Scripture was written, it must be possible that all which the Evangelists and Apostles wrote might be lost, and yet the religion taught by them would abide.

"9. Religion is not true because it was taught by the Evangelists and Apostles; but they taught it because it is true.

"10. By religion's inner truth must the Scriptures be interpreted; and no traditions or records handed down to us can give it inner truth if it has none."

When dealing with the seventh point, Goeze had confidently asked him whether, without the books of the New Testament, any trace of Christ's words and work would have come down to us. He replied, in the spirit of a reverent truth-seeker, thus:—

"God forbid that I should ever think so meanly of Christ's teachings as to dare to answer this question with a direct *No*! I would not repeat this *No* if an angel from heaven should dictate such to me, much less when a Lutheran pastor seeks to put it in my mouth. Everything that happens in this world leaves traces of its existence, though men may not always find them; and Thy teachings alone, Divine Philanthropist, which Thou didst not command to be written down, but which Thou didst command to be preached, had they been

* Lessing, as we have seen, in 1770 discovered and published Berengarius's answer to Lanfranc, "*De Corpore et Sanguine Jesu Christi*."

only preached, would have effected nothing, nor left sufficient by which we may recognise their origin. Must Thy words be first changed into dead letters in order to become words of life? Are books the one way to enlighten and improve mankind? If oral tradition be exposed to a thousand intentional or unintentional falsifications, are not books likewise exposed? Could not God, by the same exercise of His immediate power, have preserved oral traditions from such falsifications, just as well as books, as is said that He has done? Oh, out on who claims, Almighty God, to be a preacher of Thy word, and yet so impudently asserts that, to attain Thy purposes there was but one way by which it pleased Thee to reveal Thyself! Oh, out on the divine who, except by this one way which he sees, boldly denies all other ways because *he* does not see them! Gracious God, let me never become so orthodox, in order that I may never become so presumptuous!"

But in Brunswick the orthodox party were too strong to allow him to go on publishing his "Fragments" in peace. They exerted themselves to get the aid of the civil power against him, and with too much success. They took advantage of the absence of the Hereditary Prince to play upon the fears of the aged Duke, now weak and on a sick-bed. Lessing's exemption from the censorship was withdrawn, and the "Fragments" were confiscated—a thing that only increased the demand for them, not only in Brunswick, but throughout Germany. And the influence of the Goeze controversy did not stop here. "Nathan the Wise" had been sketched years before, and probably would have lain unfinished but for these attacks. He called it "the son of his approaching age, of which controversy had helped to deliver him." In it he urges his pleas for toleration with prevailing power. He himself had no expectation that it would ever be a successful acting play, and named it "a dramatic poem." He thought that, for stage purposes, it lacked passion, was too argumentative, and that the moral was too assertive and permeating for success there. But he also knew the result he aimed at, and was assured that "Nathan" would accomplish it, as indeed it did. If Lessing never soared high nor plunged deep—if he suggested too little of the mystery and wonder of existence—if he afforded few of those glimpses into the world of passion and imagination which awaken even the dimmer understandings to the beauty and terror and tragic pathos of life—he sees his goal clearly, and travels to it with unwavering directness. He thus indicated what he expected of "Nathan" in writing to his brother Karl: "Even you have formed an altogether incorrect idea of the piece. It will be anything but satirical, to enable me to quit the arena with contemptuous laughter. It will be as pathetic a piece as I have ever written. . . . It has nothing to do with our present

black-coats; and I will not barricade its way to the stage, although it might not come there for a century. The theologians of all religions will, indeed, inwardly chafe at it; but they will take care to express no public disapproval of it."

And in writing to another he speaks thus of his anticipations of its future:—"I do not know of any city in Germany where the piece could now be represented. But happy and fortunate the city where it shall first appear!" And he says in a "hundred years" it may be put on the stage.

It could be no disappointment to him, therefore, that it remained unrepresented when he died. In 1783 it was given at Berlin, and his words seemed likely to be realised, for it was pronounced a failure. His own prophecy seemed correct. The times were not yet ripe. But the favouring moment came earlier than Lessing had foretold. It was introduced at Weimar by Schiller and Goethe in 1801; immediately became a favourite, and has kept its place on the German stage. It was even acted by Greek actors at Constantinople in 1842 with success, though we learn that Nathan's frankness with the Sultan was wondered at and almost resented!

It has been well said that "Nathan" is rather a philosophic romance composed in a dramatic form than a drama; but as a romance, it is certainly one of the very best, both in conception and execution, to be found in the whole body of European literature.

As one Jew—i.e., Mendelssohn—is idealised or represented in the hero of "Nathan," another is idealised or represented in its history. There is a beautiful propriety—we had almost said, a kind of poetic justice—in the fact that indirectly we owe the publication of "Nathan" to a Jew. This was Joseph Wessely, a merchant at Hamburg, who had honoured and admired Lessing from the time of his residence there; who had written some penetrating letters on "Emilia Galotti" which were published anonymously; and who now, on hearing of Lessing's distress from want of money, troubled himself to contribute help in such delicate ways as would not wound Lessing's feelings of independence. He offered a loan through Karl Lessing, and proposed to send it without waiting for a letter from Lessing saying that he would accept it. Karl wrote, "But if he does not write to you, will he receive the money?" "I will now send it to him myself, and surely he will acknowledge the receipt of it," answered Wessely.

The offer was accepted, and the loan enabled Lessing to work on with more peace of mind than he could otherwise have commanded. But so honourable and sensitive was he on such matters, that the thought of it troubled him, and as he was composing the last act he wrote to his brother saying how much

he would grieve if the subscriptions were not enough to cover that debt, as he had no other means of paying it. "You cannot imagine," he concludes, "how this thing vexes me; and it will be a miracle if the disquietude under which I am working should not disclose itself in my writing."*

So little did any shadow of personal distress intrude into the drama, that nothing more calm, peaceful, and complete had ever come from his pen. "After that production," said Mendelssohn, "he might well be content to die." One thing of significance there still remained for him to do. This was the full development of an idea which he had announced in one of his earlier writings. With this he now occupied himself. "The Education of the Human Race," his last great work, was the result. When he had finished this, he made a journey to Hamburg in 1780, where he had great delight in a reunion with old friends. The change so exhilarated him, that something of his earlier vigour and vitality of mind appeared in his conversations. "Lessing is here," wrote Eliza Reimarus to Nicolai on the 9th of October, "and perhaps because the society of living friends is better for him than that of the dead, or even than strife with enemies, he is almost the man he was formerly." He wished to make his friends there believe that "this winter he had exchanged heads." But it was the last flicker of the flame. The return to the "everlasting monotony" of Wolfenbüttel was felt the more for the brightness of his Hamburg visit. He made another effort to create a congenial world for himself—to write for the stage; but his energies flagged; his letters became more and more despondent. On December 19, 1780, he wrote to Mendelssohn, "My dear friend, *this scene is over!*" He was spared the trial of a lingering chronic sickness which he had feared. In twelve days from the first symptoms of real illness, and in spite of the best medical care and the devoted nursing of his step-daughter, Amelia König, who was to him as a true daughter indeed, he passed away in his fifty-third year. The aged Gleim, amid tears, braced himself to write—

"Him have we lost who was our greatest pride;
Him who abroad had won our nation fame.
God said, 'Let there be light!'—and Liebnitz came!
God said, 'Let darkness be!'—and Lessing died!"

While Engel, a young man, took up the theme, and set it to a more powerful note—

"Had Britain, not Germania, given him birth,
His dust might share with kings the sacred earth,
And a proud people, grateful for his fame,
Would rear a lasting tribute to his name."

* Mr. Sime refers to the episode of Wessely only incidentally.

To the end Lessing had readily and secretly befriended the poor and outcast, in some instances directly risking the displeasure of the great. In this he reminds us of Samuel Johnson. The Jew Daveson, who had offended the Duke of Brunswick, was visited by him in prison, and found a home in his house after his release. And the story of the poor eccentric "philosopher" Könemann (who was "not always grammatical") and his dog is at once laughable and pathetic. Lessing took them in also to his house at Wolfenbüttel, kept both man and dog, and would not part with them, troublesome though they often were. "The dog is an ornament of the philosopher," said Lessing, when somebody had suggested that they were inconvenient; "for he found it in his wanderings faint and starving. He had two rolls in his pocket; he took one out and gave it to the dog, which ate it greedily; and from that moment it never left its benefactor. The two rolls were all the poor wanderer had at the time to keep himself alive. He shared them honourably; and so long as I have a roll left, the philosopher shall have half of it."

The first quality which may be noted as conspicuously characteristic of Lessing is his sincerity of nature, his complete independence of mind, his determination to go to the root, to see things for himself, to trust no mere authority, and to utter nothing as truth which his whole nature could not unreservedly accept as such. When but a youth of sixteen, he wrote home that he thought it the "duty of every young man not to take his religion on trust, but to examine the subject for himself." Lessing carried the same principle into every department of his work. He did not demand agreement with his opinions; he only claimed that, before assuming to sit in judgment on others, or to teach them, you should have fully satisfied your mind by good reasons, and have at least taken a fair and honest view of the grounds on which others had reached a different or an opposite conclusion. This lay at the foundation of Lessing's peculiar tolerance and fair-mindedness. In demanding this from others, he only asked that which he had faithfully given. He was always disposed to ask of every opinion and conclusion what it had to say for itself on broad and common grounds of reason, and to lay these to the test of his own better judgment. This habit of careful examination and self-examination (for the one in his case implied the other) resulted in two things that are seldom found combined in so full a measure as they were in him—logical clearness, allied with great range of interests, and a kind of dramatic curiosity, far from cold or merely critical, which made him dependent not only on association with others,

but laid upon him a necessity to understand them and to comprehend their ways of thinking. The impulse that urged Lessing to become a dramatist was very intimately associated with this tendency. Now, a very short survey of Lessing reveals the fact that he was remarkably destitute of that imaginative susceptibility or sensitiveness which is so powerful an element in the immediate instinctive comprehension of others. This defect left results in several ways. One of them was, that as Lessing, through the exacting character of his intellectual nature—his demand, as we may say, for reasons clear and satisfactory to himself—always tended to become an intellectual recluse, removed from a common ground with others, he was saved from the coldness generally inseparable from this character by the necessity he was under to test his own thinking by laying it faithfully alongside of other minds, rather than by the shorter process of poetic sympathy. He found in simple patience and care what in great part supplies the place of imagination to other poets. That he became, in spite of this defect, a dramatic poet at all, would be in itself a phenomenon of literature; but that he was at once a successful dramatic poet, and a critic who always rose above the range of narrow and technical and temporary interests, is still more remarkable. It would seem, indeed, as though he made his very defects serve him as other men do their endowments, and that he wholly escaped certain of the perils peculiar to natures that are over-richly endowed on the side of imagination and sentiment.

He observed closely; his mind was vigilant, penetrating, assertive; but the power of passing, as if by instinct or by magic, beyond intellectual processes to motives, was almost lacking to him. He never, in the strict sense, created a character; he only threw into dramatic shapes or forms the most striking elements of character, or rather intellectual tendency, in those whom he had most closely observed through actual association, and had, so to speak, inseparably involved in that constant combined process of examination and self-examination. And yet, by dint simply of the sincerity and thoroughness of his character, these personages not seldom impress us precisely as do the truest creations. Such instances we find in every one of his dramas. When Nathan, for instance, tells the Lay Brother the terrible tale of his calamity, and touches the depths of submission in these words, we feel it to be so:—

Nathan. Already had I lain three days and nights
In dust and ashes and in tears 'fore God—
In tears, said I? almost at war with God,
Raving against myself and all the world,
And vowing deathless hate to the Christian name.

Lay Brother. Ah, I can well believe you in your plight.

Nathan. But reason by degrees returned, and I
In calmer mood could say : And yet God is ;
This, too, He suffered—so His will be done !

Lay Brother. Nathan, you are a Christian ! 'fore my God
No better Christian lives.

Nathan. Well for us both
That you think so ; for what to you makes me
The Christian, makes of you a Jew to me.

It is indeed a remarkable fact that Lessing's leading characters are all confessedly reflections and reminiscences of his immediate friends—his father, Mendelssohn, Mylius, Kleist, and the rest. The subtle shades and intermingling of contradictory elements which appear always in the work of the inspired dramatist, suggesting something of incomprehensibility and inexhaustibleness, have little or no place in Lessing. But he does much to recover the interest in his own way. Even where he seems to forego what might be called the expression of his own personal predilections through the character, as in the "Free-thinker," he only rises to a higher idea, which is dearer to him—that of fairness, toleration. It is much that we can say that he never took a side, and that he was distinctly a dramatist in the condemnation of possible faults and vices in those who as partisans would have classed themselves with him. His great characters—Theophanus, Philotas, Nathan, and the rest—are reproduced by a laborious process of memory on the lines of intellectual discussion, the light that penetrates and imparts something of life being distinctly moral, rather than of the imagination. They are, in a word, the dramatic images of his peculiar methods of questioning and self-questioning. His philosophy lies consciously revealed to us in his poetry; and both have their foundations in the same traits of character. Hence his leading *dramatis personæ* stand to us as embodied qualities or tendencies rather than as men—creatures whose range is predetermined for them by some hard-set intellectual limits. We can hardly conceive of them moving or acting on any ground outside that which has been assigned to them by the poet, but they often affect us precisely as if we could.

The very limitations which we thus find in Lessing as a poet are confessions of that unity of moral purpose which imparts so keen an element of interest to his various works when they can be faithfully viewed in relation to each other. Each reflects him from a different angle; but, like photographs taken from various positions, the different portraits all agree with each other in the leading lines and in the expression. And the conception

of the individuality only becomes more distinct and clear as the scrutiny is perseveringly carried on.

It is thus impossible to detach Lessing from his works, and to view him as the mere thinker and writer, as may be done with some distinguished authors. The works, in his case, in a very distinct and special sense, are the man. He does not work as if from some special faculty, while the moral nature lies aloof or inactive, or is, in fact, moving along quite apart on a line of its own, as is often the case with the poet, the man of over-fine fancy and imagination, creating a world in which ordinary laws and demands of life are set aside. No shadow of such plea as Charles Lamb set up for the dramatists of the Restoration needs to be raised for Lessing. His world of art is one with his world of life, and even with his critical principles, because he was faithful to the moral elements in his character. Here lies the grand reconciling point in Lessing—the man is supremely expressed in everything he did, and his actions are at one with his precepts as far almost as they could be in the life of mortal. Mr. Browning, in "One Word More," has very finely expressed the sense of escape from the over-feverish attractions of the Ideal to the calm bliss and repose of life's true solace in loving companionship :—

"The best is when I glide from out them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side, the novel,
Silent, silver lights and darks undreamt of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence."

In Lessing there are no such reactions or escapes from one sphere to another. He is easily touched to fine issues, but he is never transported or lifted from earth into an aërial world. He treads firmly, looking round, rather than ecstatically looking up. If action is possible in any emergency, very readily and decisively it is done ; if not, it is wise to yield to the inevitable. He is clear and vigorously practical—a self-sufficient, calm contentment and superiority to lesser cares removes him from the *genus irritabile*. He finds his delights in cheerful activity: devotion to the past and its pleasures; the remote and the imaginary, which exercise so great a spell over the lives of the poets who are more strictly to be classed as lyrical, he would regard as weak, useless, and often hurtful, debilitating to the manly powers. It is very characteristic that he always wishes to subdue fine epithets and high-flown expressions in the poems of Kleist and Gleim. The clearness and supremacy of his judgment would have imparted a cold remoteness to his work had it not been for the strength of his moral nature, which always moves in harmony with it. Had he been in the least touched with sentiment and romanti-

cism—inclined to defy rule, and to set up, in opposition to the prevailing standards and tastes, an array of loose and fanciful conceits which could not be justified by good critical reasons, he could never have driven French influence from Germany, or have written “Nathan” or the “Laocoon.”

He never, indeed, seems to be under the necessity of seeking relief or of drawing help from a world of fancy; the worlds of fact and of men are enough for him when he needs to escape from the world of his own thoughts. It is this satisfaction, this restfulness, this English-like determination to make the best of things as they are, or to improve them only by appeals to the better reason, which has emphasised in the general mind the idea that Lessing was little of a poet. But if the poet is he who, by the aid of the higher faculties, seeks to bring men into harmony with a noble ideal that may in its leading outlines become a “realised ideal,” as he in his own life may be said to have realised it, and if, for this purpose, he shows the power of transmuting, at every step, the actual characters, the common and sordid experiences of life, into symbols, we would almost need to seek for a new definition of poetry that would exclude Lessing. We do not claim that he was a dramatic poet of the first rank; his processes are too evident, and his work too often cold, restrained, and infected by ill-disguised moralisings; but his power of carrying his thought into figure, and bringing it close to the “bosoms and the businesses” of men, indicates a capacity of *vicarious living and thinking* without which there can be no dramatic poetry.

His life is thus seen to impart a new character to his works. They are not faithfully seen till viewed in relation to his character; or rather his character, so expressly read in them, relates them by so manifold and so intimate links to his actual experience, that the two things cannot in strictness be separately viewed. In all poets, except those of the very highest order, the imagination hangs, as it were, a veil between the actual life and the created world; and a sense of revulsion is too often felt in passing from the one to the other. Lessing, if he lacked a powerful imagination, escaped from this revulsion. Looked at from this point of view, we cannot regard Mr. Russell Lowell's endeavour to separate the writer and the man, and his reiterated expression to the effect that the man is more interesting than the writer, as having so much ground as they might appear at first sight to have.

It indicates a great force of moral nature that Lessing should have found in those with whom he was brought into contact so much to furnish him with the images or forms that he dramatically used for his great purposes of teaching and enlightening.

His faithfulness and independence of mind are seen here also in a very striking light; for the qualifications that were so urgently needed for certain determinations of his nature were furnished by the qualities he there discovered and found available for his peculiar art. In *Theophanus* in "*Freigeist*" we have in main outline his own father. He is presented to us as having attained to that grace of character which comes only of fine moral elements duly disciplined, and he is not represented as having stripped himself of the integuments of his belief. In the Free-thinker (who again decidedly reflects certain elements in the well-meaning but contemptuous, self-assertive, and eccentric Mylius) we are distinctly taught that penetration and correctness of intellectual perception may after all be divorced from moral elevation and true refinement of nature. The clearness of vision, the balance, the justness of Lessing's judgment, is seen here precisely as in his purely argumentative works, and so also in his other dramas.

We have specially cited the "*Freigeist*" in order that we pass naturally to a remark which might otherwise be deemed far-fetched or out of place. It is this, that the pause or check which was administered to Lessing's intellectual tendency, saving him from cynicism and from becoming a sneerer and destroyer only, was derived from happy influences to which he had been subject, and which alone inspired him with the enthusiasm that is essential to any form of artistic creation. His father, it is evident, was a powerful influence, and at the very outset of his career, while as yet Lessing was working hard at comedies on the model of Molière, had suggested an absolutely original and individual starting-point. "What if I should show the illiberality of the freethinkers—those who despise the priestly office?" It is not too much to say that the father's influence, as exhibiting a lofty type of character but little touched for evil by the dogmas held, was a main factor in the maintenance of that essentially reverent and religious spirit which so distinguishes Lessing from, say, the Encyclopædists. And this, too, lay very close to that sincerity, that thoroughness and independence of mind, which we have set down as a primary characteristic.

It is here that we find the true rationale of the words which Lessing used of himself when speaking of his debt to criticism.

"People often do me the honour to recognise me as a poet, but only because they do not understand me. They ought not to draw such generous conclusions from some dramatic attempts I have made. Not every one who takes the brush in hand and scatters colours is a painter. The oldest of these attempts was written in the years in which one so gladly takes pleasure and facility for genius. With

respect to what is tolerable in my more recent efforts, I am conscious that I owe it solely to criticism. I do not feel in me the living fountain which works upward by its own force, shoots up by its own force into such rich, such fresh, such pure streams ; I must force everything out of me by the fly-press and pipes. I should be so poor, so cold, so short-sighted, if I had not to some extent learned modestly to borrow treasures from others, to warm myself at other's fires, and by the glass of art to strengthen my eyes. I have, therefore, always felt ashamed and out of humour when I have read or heard anything to the disadvantage of criticism. It is said to hamper genius ; and I flattered myself that I owed to it something which comes very near genius."

The modesty and self-respecting honesty, the thoroughness of insight, which admits no flattering glosses even in a scrutiny of self, the rare independence of mind, in a word, which could prompt so manly and candid a confession as this, is apt to blind us to the fact that, after all, it is not quite a true report. It separates too cautiously two aspects of one activity, and puts them as though they were different and conflicting. It is true that such they would be in the case of men in whom the intellectual activity was often divorced from, or at least independent of, the movement of the moral nature.

There are various points in Mr. Russell Lowell's estimate of Lessing with which we can hardly bring ourselves to agree ; but when he writes as follows, he seems to throw light on our conception rather than on his own :—

"Lessing's advice to his brother Karl, who was beginning to write for the stage, is *two parts moral and one literary* : 'Study ethics diligently, learn to express yourself well and correctly, and cultivate your own character. Without that I cannot conceive a good dramatic author.' Marvellous counsel this will seem to those who think that wisdom is only to be found in the fool's paradise of Bohemia !"

The moral element with Lessing is literally the first and the last ; the literary one is secondary, and must flow out of it : and this from the man whose conception of literary form was so exalted and severe ! His conception of the dramatist and his equipment is, however, absolutely consistent with his character and with his practice. In the light of this we may the better understand Mr. Sime when he writes :—

"The creative and critical impulses were closely associated in Lessing. Having achieved any particular work, he made it the starting-point for speculation as to the ultimate ground of the class to which it belonged ; on the other hand, if he found a body of critical ideas, he was dissatisfied until he had applied them in actual artistic effort. The two impulses were equally spontaneous ; they were, perhaps, at first equally deep. They were never quite dissociated, but

in the long-run the critical impulse became the more powerful, and to it we owe the greater and more strictly original result."

Looked at from one point of view, Mr. Sime is strictly right here. But more weight should almost, we think, have been laid on the thought which is so far lost through its merely parenthetical position, viz., that the two impulses in Lessing were never really dissociated. And seeing that "Nathan"—the last flowering of a long process—was brought to birth, as one might say, and as Lessing himself said, by the stir of theological controversy; we can hardly admit that, in the strict sense, the critical impulse in the long-run became the most powerful, since the fact is admitted that it could still be made the servant of the creative one in the effort to set forth effectively a great moral idea.

Lessing's great clearness of style has made his genius seem simpler in its elements than it really was. This accounts for a good deal of the too dogmatic criticism that has been given forth in reference to him, as though it was the easiest thing possible to understand and to exhaust him. We find, for example, Mr. Hawkins, a well-known author nearly half a century ago, writing thus: "He was esteemed a great poet, but we cannot now concede to him the inspiration of genius. . . . He had a perpetual thirst for new discoveries, and for discovering new views of old ones; but his plan of proceeding was fitful and irregular. He would compose no poem without laying down a theory for his own guidance; he was always calling himself to account and mistrusting his impulses."

The true purpose of criticism is almost completely missed in such writing as this of Mr. Hawkins. One of the most striking points about Lessing was, that he is really as much of the dramatist in his critical and argumentative works as in dramas pure and proper. He never could proceed merely as the controversialist. His dramatic curiosities are too strong, and often carry him whether he would not, it must be admitted, to the injury of his first intention not unfrequently. How his line of reasoning would strike another and a differently constituted mind is constantly present with him, not as a merely speculative consideration, however speculative the idea with which he may be concerned, but as an immediate and practical result. This it is chiefly which has imparted the aspect of fitfulness and uncompleteness that has struck some of the severer critics. Till this point of a pervading moral purpose is clearly seized, we have hardly got at the differentiating quality of Lessing's mental product; we have not found the necessary unit in it, nor discovered how completely such critics as Hawkins have missed

the point. Mr. Sime is quite right when he finds, as he does, the superabundance of familiar figure and illustrations in Lessing's prose work; but it is not till we trace the unity of his powers to a root in the moral character which urged him, partly through lack of imagination, to seek his ideal in a sense of absolute fairness, that we find the point where the man and his work pass into one presence. "It has been well said that the idea of 'Nathan the Wise' runs like a golden thread through the rich and variegated web of Lessing's intellectual life." It forms the chief motive even of his early comedies. When we have seen how completely this idea fills and illuminates every writing from his hand, the fitfulness and irregularity of his effort disappear. Mr. Sime has eloquently signalled this pervading dramatic element in Lessing in two passages which in justice to him we must cite—

"He loved to confront an opinion with its opposite," says Mr. Sime, "to thrill with the stir and glow of intellectual battle. To hear any conviction strongly stated roused in him the desire to qualify it, or to suggest grounds for calling it in question. Thus in conversation he would often take a side with which he had no sympathy; not for the barren pleasure of victory, but to see how much could be said by those who really held that for which he argued. He was sometimes blamed by one party for maintaining views which another found fault with him for rejecting. During the Seven Years' War, for instance, his friends in Leipzig were shocked by his Prussian sympathies; while, after he went to Berlin, he offended his friends there by being, as they thought, too partial to his native Saxony. *Even in his inward life it was through struggle that he pushed to new conclusions. If there was no actual opponent, he imagined one, and equipped him with the surest and most polished armour he could devise.*"

And again, with reference to his style—

"Another and essential characteristic of Lessing's style, which meets us even at an early stage, is his love of metaphors and similes. This quality is found in the same degree in no other German author. It is improbable that Lessing's thought was originally, in his own mind, so concrete as it appears in his works; for, although a poet, he was not sufficiently a poet; he was too much a pure thinker to pass from judgment to judgment by means of individual images. Had the imagination and the understanding been thus fused in him, he would have given us less criticism and more poetry. But because he was so consummate a critic, he knew that thought expressed in abstract forms is for the ordinary intelligence powerless; for the educated, intelligence without charm. Hence he deliberately clothed his ideas in visible and tangible forms; he brought them, as Socrates brought philosophy, from the clouds, and made them appear in shapes that the common understanding would apprehend and take delight in apprehending.

We find this preference for metaphorical expression in all his writings, dramatic as well as critical, theological as well as æsthetic. He ultimately became a master in its use; and *this is unquestionably one of the strongest of the many reasons for the power he still exerts. The objects from which he selects his images are rarely remarkable for grandeur and beauty; he is usually content if they are familiar, precise, and vivid.*"

The colouring of this ideal, which depends on sincerity and a sense of fairness, is as distinctly seen in the veriest trifle of criticism or of conversation as in the dramatic poems; but it is evident that it could not but operate so far to the disadvantage of lengthened trains of thought, if viewed only from the standpoint of formal logic. This, however, is not the test which should be exhaustively applied to a practical man engaged with practical questions, as Lessing always was, however much he might be under the necessity of adopting abstract terms. The presence of this ideal, rooted in moral qualities rather than in the imagination, robust and genial common sense, readiness for allowance and for compromise, and for inclusion of opposites, these things, to our idea, justify in great measure the remark which has often been made to the effect that Lessing is pre-eminently British. A writer of high repute has said—

"His mind is of a quality eminently British. Of all Germans he is the least German; yet he created German literature, and is the idol of his country. He has the qualities Englishmen most admire. He always writes with distinct purpose; the prominent characteristics of his works, contrasted with those of his countrymen, is their direct and practical tendency."

The German heaviness and thoroughness more readily allies itself with vague sentiment and a diffuse egotism, with a kind of vapid self-satisfaction, rather than with sharp sense; and so far the epithet is well applied. But Lessing is not British in so far as he is never insulated or incapacitated from bringing the ideas of others to a test in a kind of cosmopolitan reason; and thus far he would himself, we think, have been inclined to quarrel with the title of "British" as applied to him in any strict and comprehensive way. It is for this reason that, even as a politician, we may regard him as strictly faithful to his own ideal, and in this relation also to have been thoroughly sincere. German patriotism in his day he felt was narrow, alien to true enlightenment. While he would not have moved a finger to stir up discontent in those who were not already alive to the burdens that pressed upon them, he desired to quicken the sense of the enlightened to these burdens, and so to have a true cosmopolitan-

ism based on practical right and justice. He would have corroborated Heine's ideas in the following passage, though he might have been inclined to modify the expression—

"The patriotism of the Frenchman," said Heine, "consists in this—that his heart grows warm, and widens with the warmth, no longer embracing merely its near relatives, but all France, the whole civilised world. The patriotism of the German, on the other hand, consists in this—that his heart grows narrower, contracting like leather in the cold; that he hates what is foreign; that he wishes no longer to be a citizen of the world, no longer even a European, but only a narrow German. There was now to be witnessed the ideal churlishness which Herr Jahn reduced to a system. Now began the mean, dirty, unwashed opposition to the most glorious and holy feeling ever originated in Germany—the feeling of humanity, namely, the universal spirit of fraternisation, the cosmopolitanism to which all our greater spirits, Lessing, Herder, Schiller, Goethe, Jean Paul, as well as all cultivated minds, have ever done homage. What soon after came to pass in Germany is too well known to all. When God, the snow, and the Cossacks had destroyed the best energies of Napoleon, we Germans received the most gracious command to free ourselves from the yoke of the foreigner, and we flamed up in manly indignation against the all too long endured subjection, and we encouraged ourselves by the good melodies and bad verses of Körner's songs, and we reconquered our freedom; for we do everything which our princes bid us."

"Lessing's intellect, like his style," says one, "was clear, sharp, precise; he would tolerate no vagueness, and he hated rhetoric; a keen analytic, healthy intellect, practical in all its aims, decisive in its movement, *inspired by the sincerest love of truth, but never inspired by imagination.*"

Lessing's modest disbelief in his own poetic powers was favourable to his success as a dramatist. He cultivated the study of stage effect, and in one respect verified Carlyle's axiom that "Genius is patience!" He carefully watched every detail, thinking nothing, however trivial, beneath his regard. In the thoroughness with which he entered on the consideration of minutiae he is an example not only for the student and the man of letters, but for the merchant and the manufacturer. If you would succeed in your object, fail not to study and to master every point, however apparently unimportant or trivial, which bears on the technical detail of the work you may be engaged in.

Lessing's influence has been wider and more healthily pervasive throughout the whole field of culture than that of any other German. Luther regenerated the field of religious life

and thought, and indirectly influenced social life and well-being in many directions ; but the tendency of his teaching was to discredit culture where it did not seem directly to serve the ends of religious and conventional morality ; and so he becomes one-sided in view, and so far limited in influence. Leibnitz, by a process of logic the most exacting, rescued the foundations of moral sense and of religion from attack, but his "pre-established harmony" is but an ideal conception, and will pass under the influence of that which is more powerfully and acutely demonstrated. Goethe, again, stood too coldly apart from the interests in which common men must perforce find their chief concern, and sought in the ideal of pagan repose and stoicism a salve for the divisions and conflicts of his time. And thus the words of Mr. Matthew Arnold have grave significance—

"Goethe's course few sons of men
May think to emulate."

But any man may emulate the wise career of Lessing, distinguished and exceptional as were the results that flowed from the exercise of what he would have regarded as being, on the whole, ordinary faculties. We may regard him in the attitudes of religious teacher, poet, and critic, and see how, under each aspect, this is borne out.

1. Without going out of our way to claim for Lessing what he would have been too modest to claim for himself, it may yet be said, with fullest confidence, that he was a true Protestant, carrying faithfully into all departments with which he was concerned the spirit of free inquiry, demanding for every man, as of natural right, the unfettered exercise of the individual reason and conscience on all questions. He was, in this aspect, as has been said, a true successor of Luther ; he carried the doctrines of the Reformation to their proper and legitimate application in literature, philosophy, and criticism, as well as in what pertains strictly to religion. But religion being regarded by him as a permanent and permeating influence, he refused to regard it as separate from any of the true interests of life. His criticism of Scripture was never irreverent ; he distinctly intimated his desire to protect the kernel whatever might befall the shell in which it had for ages been preserved. His leading aim in theology, in fact, was to distinguish clearly between essential and non-essential—form and spirit—and his contests with theologians, as represented in the quarrel with Goeze, were invariably engaged in with the view of making this clear. Sectarian theologians he regarded as the conservators of the letter, of the mere book—men who would have spoken as

though religion would perish with their records, and therefore he continually recalled to their minds, by all kinds of arguments and illustrations, that religion was not dependent on a book, but that books were dependent on religion; and he was firm on the point that nothing final could be predicated of anything drawn merely from any book. He fully anticipated the difficulties that would arise by the progress of modern criticism, and spoke words as wise as any that have yet been uttered on that great theme.

The divorce which is even now being seen to become day by day more and more complete in whole sections of the educated community between the intellectual life and moral conviction we all profess to mourn. Accommodations of all kinds are common. Creeds and formulas are accepted and read in a wholly non-natural sense, a sense completely opposed to the constructions put upon them by their original framers, or by the plain common sense of the men who accept them. If we were required to point to a man whose life was devoted to an exposure of the evil of this tendency at a time when it began to exercise influence, and who has exhibited beyond almost all others the true spirit in which men ought to comport themselves in relation to all such questions and difficulties at whatever personal sacrifice, we should unhesitatingly name Lessing. To illustrate this point exhaustively would involve reference to each work in a long catalogue. For that we cannot afford the space, nor is it necessary. Enough if we indicate very shortly how the sincerity and unhesitating frankness of the man led him to speak words as directly applicable to one of the great perplexities of our own day, which is felt by many who yield under it, and preached against constantly by those who have not yielded or have escaped from the net, as though he were living and writing to-day for the benefit of some of the "broader" minds burdened by the shackles of "subscription." When a distinguished theologian tried to lessen the effects of Berengarius's answer to Lanfranc by accusing Berengarius of having studied ambiguity and retreated from publication under fear of consequences, Lessing made this most moderate but most efficient reply, in which he penetrates to the very essence of the matter—

"God forbid!" he exclaims, "that I should so reproach any man. I know not whether it be a duty to sacrifice happiness and life to the truth; certainly the courage and resolution necessary to such a sacrifice are not gifts which we can bestow upon ourselves. But this I know is duty; *if one attempts to teach truth, he must teach it in its integrity, or leave it alone, roundly, fully, without enigmas or reserves, with a perfect faith in its efficacy and usefulness. The gifts required for such a decision are in our own power.* Whoever will not acquire these,

or, when acquired, will not use them, shows that he has a very poor notion of the human understanding ; and he deserves to lose the confidence of his hearers who, while freeing them from some gross errors, withholds from them the complete truth, and thinks to satisfy them by some compromise with falsehood. The greater the error, the shorter and straighter is the way to truth. But refined error can prevent our recognition of its nature, and blind us to the truth altogether. . . . The man who is faithless to Truth amid threatening dangers may yet deeply love her, and Truth will forgive him his unfaithfulness for the sake of his love. *But whosoever thinks of prostituting Truth under every kind of mask and rouge, may be her pimp, but has never been her lover."*

As furnishing one illustration of the width and efficiency of Lessing's influence in the theological field, it may not be out of place to note a peculiar circumstance in the discussion that arose over the publication of "Essays and Reviews." The combatants in the field—probably because of the dust that was raised by the stampede—were very slow to see their strongest point against Dr. Temple for his production "The Education of the World." But when once it had been pointed out that the essay was in far too large a proportion a presentation of the ideas of a German "heretic," the quickness with which it was discovered that there were many others to whom Dr. Temple might have been indebted was truly astonishing. Seldom has such fertility of resource been seen in a noble cause. Libraries were ransacked suddenly, and lucky discoveries were made. Hegel was the original and then Schelling. One critic fancied he saw some shadow of parallelism in Vischer, and another even stumbled on some semblance of similarity between Dr. Temple and the younger Fichte! The "Quarterly Review" deemed it of importance enough to give a long list of parallel quotations from "The Philosophy of History" and Dr. Temple's "Essay."* As if that were of any importance, seeing that Hegel distinctly acknowledged his indebtedness to suggestions from Lessing ; and if the others did not, that was perhaps because they could less well afford it. But when a magnate of the Church of England could translate and adapt Lessing, and, in spite of adverse influence and criticism, find himself by-and-bye "translated and adapted" to higher functions, enough has been said perhaps as to the unrecognised influence in later theological thought of this poverty-stricken but potent thinker, to justify in every candid mind the title given him of "the invisible presence in modern criticism."

"What is a heretic?" asks Lessing. "It is a man who

* Quarterly Review for October 1862, p. 472.

wishes, at least, *to see with his own eyes*. The only question is, whether he has good eyes. In certain eyes the name of heretic is the greatest recommendation that can be transmitted by a scholar to posterity—far greater than the name of sorcerer, magus, exorcist, for these serve to cover many an impostor.”

It may well have been that Dr. Temple was relieved from all charge of heresy, inasmuch as he had, after all, *only seen with Lessing's eyes!* But even this would hardly suffice to explain away the difficulty that may arise hereafter on the philosophic historian when he finds that one of the organs which was most anxious to be just to Dr. Temple wrote thus of Lessing:—

“We need not tell those of our readers who are acquainted with German literature that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was one of those early Deists who, by the doubts they sowed, prepared Germany for all the long sufferings she has since suffered” (!).

When Gervinus called Lessing “Der Grosse Wegweiser der Nation”—the great fingerpost for the safe roads—he could never have anticipated such a deliverance as this. But then, *he* may have missed some aspect of his subject.

2. Lessing as a poet cannot be rigidly separated from Lessing as a theologian and thinker. He drew, as we have seen, sufficient supports for both activities from the same source. It is true, as Mr. Sime says, that he employed dramatic forms in the service of a special idea in all his more ambitious works. If, in his criticism and philosophical writing, his thought constantly passes into figure and illustration, in his poetry we see him consciously adapting and gathering illustration for his thought. In one aspect his poetry may seem less spontaneous than his prose. This was doubtless what he himself meant in that modest protest he made against being taken for a poet, and must be held to explain also what a distinguished German critic meant when he said that “Nathan” should have been written in prose. But the purely critical deliverance upon his poetic productions is not fully corroborated by the common judgment; and therein lies a kind of testimony more efficient even than his own. That he could command such interest in the vehicles he adopted for his teaching is as important a point as that he had always a high lesson to convey. If didactic poetry, which in itself, like a chrysalis, carries an element of disruption and division within itself, asserts a right to a lasting place in men's regards, it can only be on account of countervailing artistic merits. This distinctly Lessing's maturer dramas have; and the typical excellences of his style unfold themselves most fully in “Nathan,” though “Emilia Galotti” exhibits best the results

of his long and careful study of stage effect, and the technicalities of the playwright's craft. It has been well said that—

“The object of ‘Nathan’ is not to institute a comparison between the three religions as to their historical genuineness or inherent worth, but solely to rebuke the bigotry of a dominant religion, and to inculcate the simple truth that no man is better for his Christian creed unless the fruits of Christianity are seen in his life. Rötcher, in his ‘Cyclus Dramatischer Charaktere,’ has also pointed out the fine dramatic antithesis of incarnating the principle of humanity in Nathan, who belonged by birth and education to the narrowest and most exclusive of religions, thus reminding the Governments whose laws recognised in an Israelite no rights which a Christian was bound to respect, that ‘our Saviour was himself a Jew.’”

Here we are once more at the point where all the varied lines of Lessing's activity may be said to meet and fortify each other.

It indicates the power of thoroughness, sincerity, and a high purpose that “Nathan the Wise” attained the honour of holding the stage in Germany. Something is no doubt due to the wise curtailment and the adaptations it received at the hand of Schiller, who reduced it to an acting play; but more—far more—to the directness with which the lesson is enforced, and the resources the author skilfully calls to his aid for this end. Mr. Taylor, of Norwich, in his translation of the play which was published in England in 1791, and which did not a little to attract the notice of English literary men of that day to the treasures of Germany, speaks of it as an “argumentative drama;” and he was in a large measure right. It is, as we have said, more a dialogue conducted with a conscious aim after truth and fairness on all sides than a drama; a dramatised romance rather than a play. It appeals to the intellect and to the sober sense of justice and right rather than to the passions, after the manner of the legitimate drama. But how transcendent the sense of effect, how clear the control of all the elements of interest admitted, and how complete the power to mould alien influences to one great purpose, is testified on the part of a man who could thus triumph, as it were, over the very conditions of dramatic art! Lessing, indeed, cast aside, and without any conscious effort in that direction, the traditions of the stage, and elevated it once again to the position of a teacher—a thing for which also he deserves gratitude.

Mr. Froude, in speaking of the object of “Nathan” as being to teach religious toleration, condemns it as a work of art, on the ground that “nature does not teach religious toleration by any such direct method;” and he adds, that “the play is not poetry, but only splendid manufacture;” that though “the doctrine is

admirable, and the mode in which it is enforced interesting, it has the fatal fault that it is not true;" and he prophesies that "Nathan" will pass away with the mode of thought that gave it birth. But we fail to understand him fully. To teach toleration through a dramatic medium is not to enforce dogma or any abstract form, but to suggest motives for noble conduct—a thing which Shakespeare himself can hardly be absolved from having done, unless we are to reduce him to the position of the wild poet of whom Mr. Tennyson sings, "working without a conscience or an aim."

Religious toleration! What does it imply?—fairness, sympathy for others, mercifulness, the desire to think the best and to hope the best for those who think differently from us. It is the complex sum of which these are the primary elements; and have not all these been taught indirectly through the medium of dramatic creation? Did not Shakespeare teach them? Did not Ben Jonson, and do not those who still faithfully follow them in their art?

3. We have left ourselves little space in which to speak of Lessing as a critic. This, however, is the less to be regretted as the curious or interested reader will find a fair discussion of Lessing's characteristics and claims as a critic in Mr. Sime's book. He was pre-eminently sane and clear. As he was never content till he reached the fundamental principles on which any art proceeded, so he could not rest till he had made experiments in their application—and these experiments were never carried far without a reference to the life that was being lived around him. It is because Lessing never wholly lost the man in the critic that his writings are still of value for all who would follow on the same road. Schmidt has well spoken of the disease of egotistic conceit and cold self-sufficiency which is so apt to lay hold of those who keep aloof from production and devote themselves exclusively to criticism. This kind of cheap reputation had no attraction for Lessing; and the precious heritage of his life and work, exhibiting, as it does, the keenest interest in truth, as that alone which is worthy of man's highest powers, is an inalienable gift to future generations. Literary fashions may change; rules once inflexible as the laws¹ of the Medes and Persians may be cast aside to make way for new ones equally arbitrary; but Lessing will for ages be recognised as the inaugurator of a new era of literature and light; and the student will turn back with affection and reverence to the pages of the sturdy author of the "Laocoon" for suggestion and for refreshment. "He belongs to that class of writers whose value consists in what they suggest and inspire rather than in what they directly teach." He indeed will have utterly failed to grasp

the character of Lessing who does not perceive that what is most valuable in his criticism is not always what seems most positive in it. It is the lofty but unaffected chivalry which shines through his most trifling productions that is most to be dwelt on and admired. His thoughts were clear; he seldom judged wrongly, but his spirit was always elevated: he was ready to defend good causes, however hopeless—to protect truth, however despised. “If the student wishes to know Lessing properly,” writes one, “he must see him fighting his battles, and in these battles he is not always to contemplate chiefly the matter of the dispute, but the fine play of the muscle, the sure aim of the stroke, the position of the combatant wisely chosen and maintained with a kingly attitude. A hireling fencer he most certainly is not; but you will often be surprised, after much preparation, to see this Titan take his stand against Jove in behalf of some climbing-boy or a poor penniless beggar—some stray heroism on earth not loudly sounded, but recorded by an angel in heaven.”



ART. V.—THE INDIAN FAMINE: HOW DEALT WITH IN WESTERN INDIA.

THE numerous papers on the Indian Famine published recently are evidence of the intense interest taken by the English public in the great dearths which affect one part or another of our Eastern possessions so often, that they seem, to those who have not fully realised the vast extent and variety of those territories, to recur with appalling frequency. It is not merely the compassion and liberality of the nation that respond to the immediate call: grave statesmen and economists strive to find, besides what may alleviate present suffering, some remedial, or rather preventative, policy which may stand us in stead for the future. This tone of mind, one eminently worthy of an imperial nation, is most faithfully represented by an able writer in the “Times” of October 16th, from whom we quote the following expression thereof. After mentioning the members of the Indian Civil Service (he might have said of *all* the Indian services) as capable of giving advice on the subject, he adds: “It is impossible to believe that their joint wisdom can do nothing for the hard problem before us, that they can